



トモサの日記
トモサの日記!



Prologue

Thinking that I would like to try writing one of these diaries that men have written for a long time, I, as a woman, have started writing one as well.

This is a diary chronicling the daily life of a high class noble and his loyal retainer and about a profound love that has surpassed social status. So, if by chance it has fallen into the hands of someone besides myself, I beg of you to hold your tongue and absolutely never reveal the information held within.

... Your Excellency, please stop making me read this! In the first place, gender has nothing to do with diaries in this country and Your Excellency is clearly a man. And furthermore, what is this 'love that has surpassed social status?' Love?

Just come out and say it. This diary is a delusional explosion of the unrequited love you have towards His Majesty.

B-be quiet, Dacascos!

You are saying such things after I have graciously given you the honor of reading this in secret. This is the problem with soldiers. They do not even try to understand literature...

Whatever Your Excellency, but why are we communicating in writing?

* * * * *

Even though he has just become the 27th Demon King of The Great Demon Kingdom, Yuuri Shibuya has already set one record.

"The youngest king in history? How is that different than rookie-of-the-year?"

"They're both impressive."

Just as Lord Conrart Weller's hand paused in stirring the pot, a super beauty came in with an irritated gait, sleeves fluttering.

"Your Majesty! Just when I thought I had not seen you around, you show up in a place like this? Like I have asked before, please stop partaking of meals in the kitchen!"

"You're calling this a meal? This is just taste-testing."

Lord Günter von Christ is the tutor of the youngest Demon King in history and in an important position assisting the king with his professional duties. It might sound nice to call him a royal advisor who has just snatched a small plate from his master, but the man with the disheveled grey hair always chasing after Yuuri is actually just an overprotective person.

"And you too, Conrart. Why are you stirring a pot?"

"Why?" The great actor Conrad, able to speak to anyone with a smile, shrugs lightly at

Günter who has his nostrils flared in anger. "Because it will burn."

"Yeah yeah, it'd be a waste if it burned."

Hearing this well coordinated manner of speaking from the two of them, the tutor felt dizzy for just a moment and hurriedly pulls himself together.

Even though Yuuri only lets his guard down around Conrad, there's no point in Günter losing himself in these foolish feelings. No actually, lately it seems that it is not only around Conrad that he lets his guard down. He has also been speaking more frankly with Wolfram and he ended up getting friendlier with Gwendal. To make matters worse, when he is around Lady Celi he blushes and according to a rumor, he may have been taken in by Anissina's poisonous nature.

(1)

"Ahhhhhh Your Majesty... Does Your Majesty hate me!?"

"Wh-what's this all of a sudden!? What's wrong, Günter? You're always having an emotional overload."

Yuuri is pushed back a half step when the much larger man leans against him. The kitchen worker that came back from the storeroom drops a bag of potatoes in shock.

"Wait, are those real tears!? Ah, the potatoes are rolling away."

"I have no choice! No matter how much I express my love, Your Majesty disappears and jests only with Conrart and Wolfram..."

"Well Günter, you're not really the type who would want to joke around and then you go and write it all down in that diary."

"Those words are piercing my heart one by one. Lately my job ranking has lost a star and my public ranking in Your Majesty's partiality has taken a nosedive."

"What is this public ranking thing? Is it like sumo ranking and there's a yokozuna at the top? No, before that, what's this about partiality!?"

While methodically stirring with the wooden ladle, Conrad explains in a way that even an elementary school student would understand.

"It's when someone of a high status looks favorably upon another and loves them."

"Love!?"

"My name has now fallen lower than Greta's!" Günter lamented.

If he wanted, he could become famous by bringing women to tears, but this super beauty was actually a tearful man. The second kitchen worker coming back from the storeroom drops a basket of eggs in shock.

"Ah! Raw egg is everywhere. Calm down Günter. Greta is, well, my daughter so that can't be helped, you know? Even though we're not related by blood."

The last comment ended up increasing the tutor's anxiety and tears form in his violet eyes.

"And... and these past few days I have felt a gaze upon me at all hours as if my comrades are ridiculing my pitiful position. I can't take it anymore tosa!"

"Huh!?" Yuuri stiffens instantaneously as if he has heard something he shouldn't have.

"Wh-what did you just say?"

"M-my apologies! I, of all people, was driven to agitation."

Searching around for a bottle of red wine with his right hand, Conrad explains after taking a sip. He himself didn't pay much attention to it, but Conrad actually held the top rank on the list.

"There is a lake named Tosa in the Christ territory and Günter was born there. His mother is

a member of the Lake Shore Tribe blessed with magical talent and the von Christ family has a villa there.”

“So at Lake Tosa ‘I can’t take it anymore tosa’... is the dialect? A local dialect? So Günter is a stubborn-born guy from Tosa.” (2)

“No, ‘stubborn’ is the sound a pheasant makes. I was born at the lake shore.”

“Ah yeah, cuckoos are at lake shores, huh? Ah no, I’m confused!”

The always-composed Lord Weller stoops down to adjust the heat on the stove.

“But that gaze you mentioned has me worried. I don’t think that there is anyone with enough free time here at the castle to follow Günter around all day. If a suspicious person has been coming and going from the castle, there is a problem with security. None of the children come this far into the castle on school field trips, after all.”

“Rather than a child it is more, more of a passionate gaze.”

“A passionate gaze! Then maybe some girl is stalking you? You’re ridiculously good looking, Günter.”

“Please do not say something so sad. Your Majesty is aware that I am fully devoted only to you. I would not be pleased by being coveted by a woman from somewhere.”

“The part you’re worrying over is peculiar, Lord von Christ.”

After throwing a fleeting, sidelong glance at his coworker rubbing his cheek against his master’s hand, Conrad pours some wine in the pot and, after stirring it slowly, tastes the contents.

For him, this is a normal, calm and peaceful scene.

The third kitchen worker to come back from the storeroom slips and drops a bag of flour.

The floor is just about ready to be deep-fried.

(1) Linguistic notes on word choice~ There are two different ways to say ‘let your guard down’ in Japanese (that I know of ^-^). One is ‘to yield your mind’ and the other is ‘to yield your heart.’ Guess which one Mr. Jealousy used XD Anyway, the heart version of ‘let your guard down’ here has a connotation that the person is someone they trust and would confide in.

(2) The name Tosa (トサ) looks exactly the same written here in the alphabet, but it is written differently in Yuuri’s comment (土佐). This is to show that Yuuri is thinking about the Tosa Province in feudal Japan which is now known as Kouchi Prefecture. The famous samurai/politician Ryouma Sakamoto is from this area.

* . * . * . *

Lord Gwendal von Voltaire, the eldest son of the three demon brothers who look nothing alike and the man who wouldn’t mind collapsing from overwork if it was for the prosperity and glory of

The Great Demon Kingdom, walked with his usual dour face as he lamented over his misfortune.

In the first place, this territory is under the direct control of the Demon King and he is now in a stone hallway in Blood Pledge Castle that was built in the royal capital – not his own castle in the Voltaire region that he governs over. Just a few days ago, he was summoned to the capital and forced to take care of all kinds of official duties as the representative of His Majesty, the current Demon King. Just how many pending problems had he put temporary policies into play for and how many request forms had he signed as a proxy?

Of course if the office work at the capital falls behind there will be disorder in the kingdom, but if things keep going as they are, he'll end up the regent of the current Demon King. This isn't funny. Like he'll tolerate being made the regent of that troublesome kid? If Yuuri himself were there, he would probably at least jokingly say 'How cruel.' Imagining that, Gwendal cheers up a bit.

Anyway.

He managed to do something about the urgent matters. Gwendal should now be released. Perhaps he would be able to return to his home tomorrow. When he gets back, the first thing he'll work on is completing Bandou Eiji that he had left half finished. After that, he's going to put a yellow collar on the kitty he is fostering. Of course, both of these are knitted animals. Since The Red Devil is away on vacation, he can immerse himself in his hobby in peace.

Hearing the voices of people coming around the corner, Gwendal hardens his face once again from the relaxed expression that had found its way onto it. If someone found it odd for him to be grinning, he doesn't know what sort of rumor will be started.

The ones who came around the corner in a dispute are the king and his retainer – Yuuri and Günter. Because of their negligence... his blood pressure rose instantaneously.

"... What?"

However, as the pair passed by without noticing him, he saw a small black shadow trailing behind them. Hiding behind pillars and such, it seems that it is stalking them.

"A stalker? In the castle?"

Be that as it may, just why exactly do they not notice this when it's following so close behind them? He can only think that it is because they have become lax as important people to the kingdom. Lord von Voltaire immediately runs forward with his long legs, quickly grabs the pursuer by their neck and lifts them off the ground. They're very petite. No, rather than petite, they're small. After they're lifted up, their legs flail about in the air.

"... A child?"

"Aw-that's-mean-I'm-not-a-kid-y

ou-know-even-though-I-look-like-this-I'm-already-an-adult-anyway-uh-can-you-let-me-down-please-no-no-I'm-not-a-suspicious-person-I-am-clearly-not-a-questionable-person-however." (1)

He has white and grey clothes on and flat-soled shoes. His golden brown hair is neither short nor long and his face cannot be categorized as beautiful, but the always moving glint in his eyes shows that he is a quick thinker. Gwendal realizes he is a boy as he carefully observes him, but there isn't really anything masculine about him.

"You don't really stand out."

"Ah-this-what-this? This-these clothes and shoes are a new product that I just bought

recently. With a little bit of magic, my footsteps disappear and with a little bit of magic, I don't look like a predator."

"... Then it's just camouflage."

"No-it's-nothing-of-the-sort-I-got-it-at-a-recently-established-and-convenient-store-named-The-Queen's-Design."

Is that by chance a store for Anissina's inventions!?

"Uhhhh-I'm-a-bit-late-in-introducing-myself-but..."

"I won't say anything bad, but it is in your best interests to not touch anything in that store."

"Eh-why-there-are-a-lot-of-interesting-things-there-like-magic-powered-laundry-clips-and-magic-powered-sleeve-roller-uppers-the-fact-that-the-consumers-are-never-told-just-what-part-of-the-products-is-magical-is-what's-surreptitiously-making-the-place-famous... kyaa!"

After hearing someone defending the creations of Anissina, his childhood friend, his knitting teacher, his lifelong nemesis, one of The Great Demon Kingdom's Three Great Witches, The Red Devil, Gwendal became incredibly furious.

Do you have any idea how much flagrant abuse he has received as an unhappy guinea pig for those lucky few products to receive surreptitious fame?

He no longer thinks 'now that I look at him with his big and round eyes like a small animal, he might be cute' and he turns toward Günter and Yuuri who still haven't noticed the commotion behind them and throws the small stalker at them.

"What-is-this-is-this-another-magic-powered-catapult-or-something-hyooo..... oomph!"

He had wonderful aim.

(1) This person just randomly says 'however' at the end of some of his sentences. He also randomly switches back and forth between talking super fast and normally. Don't let it confuse annoy you ^-^

* * * * *

"Allow-me-to-properly-introduce-myself-however."

After the two of them got lumps in the same place, the stalker finally introduces himself in Günter's private room. Günter gazes at the business card he is handed and reads aloud.

"The Central Literary Institute of The Great Demon Kingdom... Badwik Folkloke... Editor... So does that mean you have come to the castle for a news story? Ah, you are certainly not here to publish a picture collection of His Majesty, are you?"

Even when they are sitting down together, there is still a difference in height like with a child and adult. The petite man who called himself Badwik narrows his small-animal-like eyes and waves his hand in front of his face.

"No no no, this time I am not here for His Majesty, ah-no-well-if-it-is-permissible-I-would-be-honored-to-create-an-official-picture-collection-of-His-Majesty-the-27th-Demon-King, but you see this time I am here about your diary."

"Diary!?"

Günter's chair makes a loud noise as he stands up and hurriedly looks around. It's his private room so there is no one else around and because it's a western style room, Mary isn't watching from the other side of the paper doors. Of course, the walls don't have ears either. (1)

"A-a diary? Just what sort of diary are you speaking of!?"

"Actually-it's-something-a-friend-of-mine-got-a-hold-of-however. That friend is a man that has devoted body and spirit to the soul of His Majesty the great True King and has chosen to live a life that one steeped in worldliness such as I can't even imagine however."

Gulp.

Sitting in front of this fast-talking editor who smiled sociably as his dark brown eyes flitted about the room, the only thing Günter was able to do without revealing the agitation he felt was to give a small nod.

"Let-me-see-it-is-in-a-place-that-is-called-in-common-terms-a-garden-of-learning-however. I'm-sure-you-know-but-the-daily-life-there-is-very-austere-and-strict-not-just-the-hair-on-the-head-and-eyebrows-but-all-the-hair-on-the-body-is-removed-and-they're-made-all-sleek-and-smooth.

"SI-sleek and smooth?"

He questioned in a way to feign ignorance, but he was already fully aware of this. After all, it was just a half a month before that he had come back from a trial period at that garden of learning due to a slight misunderstanding. Even if he tried to, he would never be able to forget that place where the monks of indeterminate age lived life completely disconnected from reality.

"And-you-know-what-and-you-know-what?"

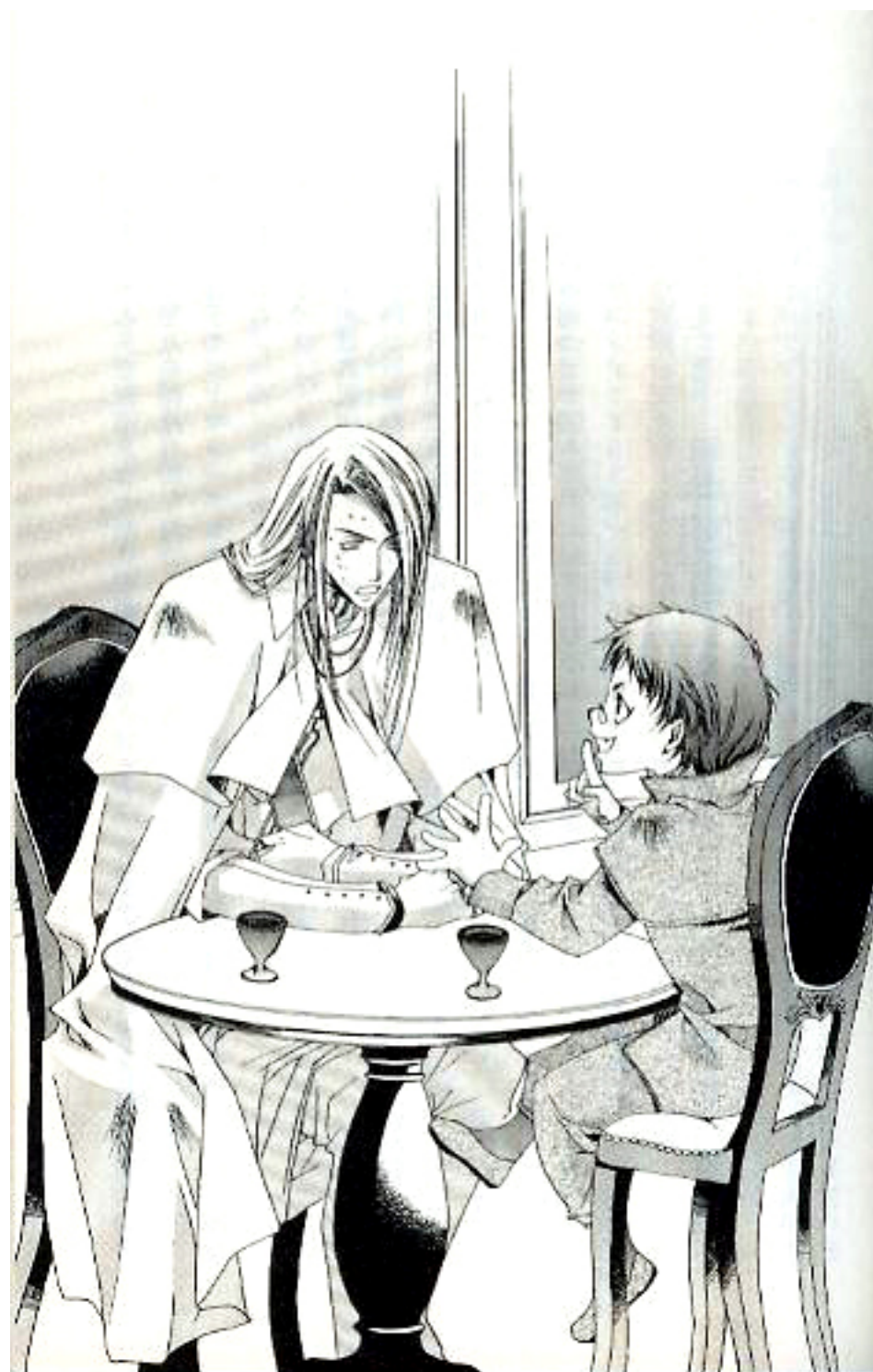
My-friend-has-told-me-that-lately-they-have-enjoyed-a-private-pleasure-from-a-certain-diary-being-passed-around-that-was-transcribed-in-utmost-secrecy-however!

Oh-and-it's-in-the-form-of-a-short-novel-about-forbidden-love-and-adventure-and-friendship-between-men-and-all-sorts-of-fascinating-things-that's-an-unstoppable-mine-cart-that-you-can't-stop-reading-once-you-pick-up!"

Günter was perspiring unpleasantly on his back and his cleavage (although he doesn't have any) as he looked at the cheerful Badwik.

He remembers.

He *really* remembers.



At bedtime on the first day of his trial period, the head monk and the self-important and boorish monk both inconsiderately commented on and confiscated his diary. It was not returned until he left on the last day of the trial period. What if it had been copied word for word by someone on the inside? Um, what if that would-be masterpiece 'A Love Diary Composed in Summer' was seen by all of the people at that monastery? Whether he was aware of the screaming in Günter's heart or not, the editor suddenly changed the topic.

"And so, Your Excellency Lord von Christ, do you know what sort of novels are being read on the streets nowadays?"

"Ah, yes, um... 'Record of the Drunken War' I believe?"

Badwik slaps his knee joyfully.

"Exactly! It's a deeply moving piece of literature on a grand scale about a certain king who loses everything simply because of his drunken fighting, but never gives up and with his companions, who have sworn allegiance to him, rebuilds his country! And what else?"

"I... am well-versed in books for education, however I am not quite as enlightened on novels intended for the general public... If I remember correctly, I heard of the title 'Fish Wars.'" (2)

"Yes yes! It is an amusing story about an acrobatic troupe of marine life under a false front that is in fact a group of beautiful warriors who use illusions of fish in a war to gain influence for the ocean however! That one has many expansions and has even been made into an opera. There's a big rumor that if the theme song is played the sales of seafood go up.

Both-of-these-are-published-by-The-Central-Literary-Institute-of-The-Great-Demon-Kingdom-thank-you-very-much-for-the-popularity-it-has-received."

Now that he has been thanked with a business smile, it is difficult to tell Badwik that he hasn't read either of them. In the heat of the moment, against his better judgment he says in a good-natured way that he cried at the climax.

"However," the editor Badwik continues with a slightly despondent expression, "I'm afraid to say that among the books that we have to work with, no, this is a problem that affects the publishing business across the world... there are next to no works that women would enjoy."

"That women would... I see."

Lord von Christ was absolutely not sexist. He had never thought even once that 'women and children do not need an education!' Actually, his adopted daughter Gisela had studied healing magic at the kingdom's highest institute of learning and was now an active military officer in the medical division. Despite this, the reason he gave this vague answer was because he could not easily imagine Lady Celi or Anissina enjoying a novel.

Her Majesty the Previous King, Lady Cecilie von Spitzweg, only ever read the love letters she received from men and Lady von Karbelnikoff, The Mad Magicalist Anissina, only read massive, ancient documents detailing evil magic of legend.

Literary works aimed at women? What sort of things would those be?

"Of-course-there-are-the-rare-women-who-deeply-enjoy-military-histories-and-academic-books-however!

But-however-many-of-the-ladies-surely-wish-for-more-teen-love-comedies-and-epic-love-stories-that-set-their-hearts-aflutter! Tears scattering on the wind! Feelings rushing out! Lovers who

wish to be together but their destinies keep them apart!"

That is not comedy.

Hesitating on making that comment, Günter was forced to take a sip of his tea. There was an indescribable aura coming from Badwik as he passionately spoke.

"And then it hit me! It was my duty as a man in the publishing business to publish novels that the career women of the kingdom could enjoy while on break, that the housewives managing the families could enjoy between their housework and that the young daughters can discuss between classes.

A-flesh-and-blood-book-the-ladies-can-look-forward-with-excitement-yes-that-is-the-beginning-of-the-story-the-key-to-the-world-the-journey-starts-now!"

"I-I have also sort of come to have that feeling."

"Right!?"

To be honest, he had no idea what the last part meant, but not even the lunch bell can stop an editor who has started talking about literature. Even Lord von Christ got caught up in the mood and was just nodding at his small companion.

"I'm-sure-you've-already-guessed-what-I'm-trying-to-say-by-now-however."

Therefore when Badwik said that, he hadn't the slightest idea of what exactly he was supposed to have figured out. Does he want the approval of The Great Demon Kingdom's official Royal Advisor as publicity for his books?

The passionate editor leaned forward with the short upper-half of his body and continued in a low but strong voice.

"... I want to publish Your Excellency's diary."

"Ah, my diary... publish?"

The two words spun around in his head and the lump on there he had gotten before suddenly began to heat up.

Diary diary diary, publish publish publish.

Publish, verb. To print books, documents, etc. and distribute them. Taken from 'The New Great Demon Kingdom Dictionary.'

The dreadful meaning of the simple word slowly soaks into Günter's head.

"We in The Women and Children's Division of The Entertainment Literature Publication Department at The Central Literary Institute of The Great Demon Kingdom would absolutely love to commercially publish 'A Love Diary Composed in Summer' written by Your Excellency Günter however!"

"Eh!? Ehh!? Ehhhhh!? Certainly not my love diary!? No but that is actually the second volume and the one before that is 'A Dream Diary that Starts in Spring' but no that's not the problem, that is a secret, an absolute secret! I mean, His Majesty and I... eh, ah, uh, umm it is simply a slightly dramatized recounting of my loyalty and confidence..." (3)

"I know.

Ah-I-was-deeply-moved-it's-a-frankly-recorded-masterpiece-of-the-forbidden-love-and-discord-between-a-master-and-servant."

"No, like I said it is ostensibly about loyalty and confidence..."

"But no matter how you read it, it's about love and discord isn't it?"

He's been found out. He's been completely found out.

Before the penetrating eyes of an experienced editor, the resistance of an amateur is near futile. The super beauty who is the tutor and royal advisor to the current Demon King began sweating around his orderly eyebrows, his temples and even under his grey hair. Scalp check please.

“L-I-I-love and discord of all things, that’s ridiculous tosa!”

“Oh Your Excellency, are you from Tosa? Actually, my relative’s friend’s teacher’s mother’s old lover was born at Lake Tosa however. I have travelled to the travel depot out of wanting the nostalgia of hearing the accent of my birthplace.”

He has no relation whatsoever to Lake Tosa, but Günter decides it is best to go along with it.

With a smile that has no feeling of any malice, the editor puts down the tea cup he had been holding with both hands.

“How about it? Will you allow the story of the unrequited love and conflict disguised as loyalty towards His Majesty be published for the ladies who hope for a romance novel? Ah, of course I don’t mind if you wish to make changes to hide your identity such as using fake names of places, people and jobs.

In-that-case-I-Badwik-will-help-you-in-that-endeavor-despite-my-poor-abilities-however!”

“Saying it is unrequited is mean!”

Assaulted by a buzzing in the ears like an army of bees is flying around, Günter rocked his body left and right with an irregular timing.

“Ah, and then that previous volume ‘A Dream Diary that Starts in Spring’ was it? If you’re willing, I would also like to read that one as well.

Actually-there-aren’t-enough-pages-in-the-love-diary-and-the-introduction-is-a-bit-abrupt. And if there are any anecdotes and the like that may help in understanding the personalities of the characters, I believe it will firmly grab the ladies hearts however. For example, ‘Ah His Majesty is sooooo cuuute’ or ‘How Lord Weller aaaalways takes all the good parts is coooooool’ or ‘Don’t give up the game, Skinny Frog, His Excellency is here!’” (4)

“His Majesty is sooo cuuute? In other words, that anecdote would be a charming story that would make the sweetness of His Majesty known?”

When it comes to searching for His Majesty the current Demon King’s sweetness, there is no one better suited for the job – although he doesn’t want to boast about it. By the way, if any misguided fellow tried to overtake him in this area, they would probably be burnt to a crisp by his jealous glare.

Suddenly met with an energetic Günter, the editor makes a confused face.

“If so than I have as much as you need! Among the recent charming incidents, there is an excellent one that I absolutely cherish...”

“Ah, just as I thought-pon, ah, excuse me, just as I thought however!”

Rather than loyalty, it is love.

(1) There is an urban legend in Japan that if you’re alone, doing something you’re not supposed to or think that no one is watching, ‘The walls have ears and the paper doors have eyes’ (kabe ni mimi ari, shouji ni me ari). There is a popular joke that then goes ‘The walls have ears and Mary

is at the papers doors' because the way to say 'have/has eyes' (me ari) is almost exactly like how Mary is written in Japanese phonology (mearii). ---> Kabe ni mimi ari, shouji ni mearii.

(2) These are spoofs on anime: Record of Lodoss War and Sakura Wars.

(3) The part where Günter says it's a secret is actually a joke on the nickname for the series, MaruMa, which is the character ma (マ) in a circle (maru) ---> ㊤. The first time Günter says secret, it has this character for secret (秘) (pronounced 'hi') written in a circle and then Günter says 'it's MaruHi!' The publishing company custom made that character in a circle. I can't even type it for you - though I tried! Technically I couldn't even type ㊤. I had to copy and paste that from somewhere. I know how to do it in Word, but not here ^-^;;;;

(4) The 'don't give up Skinny Frog' is a joke on a famous haiku poem by Issa Kobayashi. The original is 'Don't give up Skinny Frog, Issa is here!' Extra info: Apparently he was in a writing slump when he came up with the poem and he happened to come across a frog. He saw himself in the frog desperately fighting with another creature and he named the frog Issa.

The Taming of the Bear

This is the latest anecdote that I have come to know of by questioning the guards with feigned indifference about Lord Wolfram von Bielefeld until my legs stiffened from standing.

Ah, if it were possible I would have also liked to be by His Majesty's side! And I would have liked to experience the whole range of emotions with my own body.

His Majesty is surely unaware of the heartrending feelings I possess that cross even the ocean.

*Far across the sea
In my heart I fly to you
Bidding you farewell;
But no written word, alas!*

From the ship to you may pass. (1)

ごきげんよう



Day One

Anyone who is asked to be a model for a painting will hesitate a little bit. And if it's not a painting of a naked woman but a naked man, 8 or 9 out of 10 will refuse.

Naturally, I also hesitated. And then I gently declined.

Despite that, the painter was very understanding and convinced me by saying that now is the best opportunity since I'm young and I should have a painting of when I am at my most beautiful – like a cameraman coaxing an idol into taking off their clothes. As for me, I was just getting more and more annoyed so I consented to go along with it as long as I only had to be shirtless. I'd gotten some muscles from my daily workouts and wanted to see the results of the training device that Gwendal had thrown away a few days ago.

The device that was created with the best of Great Demon Kingdom science looked just like the Body Blades I saw on infomercials all the time. It seems to be called a Magical Blade and is for increasing magic power, but it's astonishing how well it works your dorsal muscles when you grab the center and shake it. As one would expect from the favorite device of the great pitcher Randy Johnson, I'd really be able to get some nice muscles with it. (2)

"If that was the case I wouldn't have minded if I'd been able to leave behind a painting of my mini-macho body I developed as long as it wasn't some overly sexy photo!"

"Don't run away, Yuuri! That's not manly!"

Holding down the clothing that covered the lower part of my body, I rushed towards the door. Wolfram runs after me with his nose pinched after he throws his paintbrush aside.

"You agree 'o lemme pain' you so sit back down!"

"Gimme a break! Okay, yeah, I'm only half naked but what's up with this grass skirt!? I love the king of the jungle but I don't wanna be King Tarzan! And then, what's up with this, this, uuuugh, this horrible smell!? What is that!? What company did you get your oil paint from? One that gets the oil from dried fish!?"

There was an incredible stench spread throughout the room that made me not want to breathe. Being the only one in the room who shrewdly protected his nose with a magic-powered laundry clip, Wolfram gets a firm hold on my grass skirt.

"Crap! Give me one of those magic laundry clips or whatever they're called! Ah! This smell is making me pass out!"

"Seriously, people who don't understand art are so troublesome. Even when presented with the finest pigments, all they can talk about is the smell!" The angelic beauty and former crown prince with the dazzlingly beautiful blonde hair and the emerald green eyes that remind you of the bottom of a lake said as he wiggled his laundry clip. "This is a rare and valuable pigment that one hardly ever comes across. I thought it was close to your skin color so I specifically ordered it from abroad. Depending on who you ask, it is made from the excrement of a ma-"

"A monkey!? It's monkey crap!?"

"No, not a monkey."

"Whether it's from a monkey or not, don't draw my face with paint made from crap. And besides," I shake off the hands of the amateur artist and step near the canvas, enduring the

burning smell that is bringing tears to my eyes. If the eldest son's hobby is knitting and the third son's hobby is painting, they are brothers who have a huge gap between their hobbies and appearances. Considering this information, it might be in my best interests to not ask what exactly the second son does in *his* private life. "Just what about this is my portrait? Is this how you see me? No matter how you look at this, not even Picasso..."

The sturdy chest and ripped abs I was currently developing were drawn as saggy and protruding. There is eyeshadow around the comically round eyes and – this might be my imagination – there are several long eyelashes fanning out. Now if only there was a sake bottle in one of the hands.

"... This is a Shigaraki Tanuki! This is a tanuki that passed out at a bar! So you flatter me by saying I'm beautiful and I'm attractive but this is how you really see me? Even abstract art has its limits." (3)

"Are you jealous of my talent?"

"No. And what is this chest!? These are saggy boobs!"

The nipples are drawn in with careful detail, but the shape is more of a sumo wrestler's than a baseball player's.

"They're definitely at least a B cup. If you draw misleading things like this, JARO is going to give me a call!" (4)

"Jaro? What's a jaro?"

"It doesn't matter!" (5)

Trying to get some fresh air, I throw open the window. The yellowish light of an autumn afternoon shines through and the air blows in some dry leaves.

I flap around the handy clothing around my waist and try to blow away the stench. The sight of someone flapping around a grass skirt with both hands must be incredibly strange.



“What are you doing? Help me. At this rate we won’t be able to sleep tonight.”

Yeah, this is my sitting room – my private living room adjacent to my bedroom. It’s as wide as two tennis courts but it is definitely supposed to be the private room of the king.

“But why exactly are you living with me? There must be a bunch of guest rooms in a ridiculously huge building like this, right?”

Without even the least bit of shyness, Wolfram crosses his arms across his chest. It’s very close to his perfected, haughty pose.

“My older brother’s troops are using the lodging in the outbuildings, but the eastern side of the castle is for honored guests.”

“That’s it, the guest housing! It’s a place for the important foreign people to stay right? There aren’t any guests here now so you can live there. If you do, then Greta will stop being suspicious of me and Nicola will stop whispering to me that two-timing is bad.”

“I can’t stay at the guest house. Haven’t you heard?”

Why can’t you stay there? Because you’ll be infected by inferiority? It’d be alright if you were just sleeping there.

The pretty boy somehow snorts with the magic-powered laundry clip on his nose and looks down upon me in my grass skirt.

“You don’t even know what’s happening in your own castle. This is why I call you a wimp. Günter or Conrart didn’t tell you? Listen, there’s a monster that no one has seen living in the eastern side of the castle.”

I gave a light shrug and stuck out my chin. With my eyebrows raised so much, I end up with a ridiculous look on my face.

“A monster?”

“Yes.”

“Monster as in an evil spirit?”

“It’s not an evil spirit. Now remember, Yuuri, if you act just a little stupid people will like you for being cute, but when you say something so extremely ridiculous like that, people are going to laugh at you for being an absolute idiot. There’s no way that we would be troubled by an evil spirit. The majority of them have pledged their loyalty to the demons.”

“Wow that’s cool. So you’re all magical companions. But then monsters and ghosts are different? Why’s that? What’s different?”

I wonder if it’s how many legs they have or the shape of their shells or maybe they have star designs on their backs.

Wolfram puts his painting supplies away and folds up his easel with a light kick. His attitude is saying ‘I’ll just leave things like this for today.’ Now I really want to ask just whose room is this.

“If that’s the case, then if we drive out that monster then guests will be able to stay there.”

“Huh? Why are you saying something weird again?”

“It’s not ‘weird.’ If we can successfully get that thing out of there, you can live in the guest housing, right Wolf? That way even if you force me into modeling for a painting, my entire room won’t be contaminated!”

“If it could have been dispatched easily the palace guards or the garrison would have taken care of it a long time ago. The fact that that hasn’t happened means that our opponent is trouble.”

“We don’t know that. Maybe it’s really just super weak and no one has managed to find its weak spot yet? It’s decided! For clean air and a room all to myself and for a quiet night’s sleep, I will eradicate the monster!”

It sounds like something I would hear in an RPG. I stand up tall in my primitive outfit, place both hands on my hips and yell wildly, “I will fight this resolute monster! Tarzan doesn’t lie! Matsuzaka is scared of monsters and I can catch any ball he throws!” (6)

I have no intention of trying to catch a ball of his, however.

(1) So this is a verse from The Tosa Diary. I forgot to mention that there is an actual story named The Tosa Diary in Japan ^-^; It was written by Ki no Tsurayuki and is famous because it’s the first diary in Japanese published as a piece of literature. It’s also written in kana (the phonetic writing system in Japan) which was used by women instead of Chinese which is what men used. I can write a whole essay on the development of writing in Japan so... I’ll leave it at that XD I’m sure you can see how the diary being published relates to this book. (I’m gonna go paste this in the prologue...). ANYWAY, I got this verse from an official English translation of the original verse by William N. Porter. (from [here](#) if you want to read it). It’s a bit of an artistic translation because the translator probably wanted to keep the poem feel to it, but basically the verse is saying that the guy is thinking of the people across the ocean (he’s on a boat) but since his feelings aren’t something physical, the people he’s thinking about won’t know.

(2) Two things in this footnote. First, Body Blade is a reference to the magical blade in AshitaMa chapter 3. Anissina made this device so that’s why Gwendal took it away from Yuuri XD Here’s [a link](#) to a SUPER random page I found while looking for a picture of the actual product. Random info~ Body Blade is written in English and Magical Blade is written in Japanese. Second, Randy Johnson is a former American baseball player who was on a bunch of different teams. When this story takes place, 2001, he was with the Arizona Diamondbacks. He’s actually ‘famous’ for when he was pitching and accidentally killed a bird that swooped onto the field just as he threw the ball. Poor birdy literally exploded in a poof of feathers :(Incidentally, this also happened in 2001~

(3) Shigaraki is an area in Japan famous for its pottery and it has a lot of clay beds. So, pottery from there is special and they also make a lot of tanuki statues in their own unique style. Here’s [a link](#) to a picture.

(4) JARO is the Japan Advertising Review Organization. They handle complaints from consumers and deal with misrepresentation in advertisements.

(5) This was a pun that I couldn’t figure out how to keep as a pun. Wolfram asks ‘Jaro? What’s that?’ A way to say ‘what’s that?’ in an informal/casual way is ‘nan daro?’ but Wolfram says ‘nan jaro?’ which means the exact same thing HOWEVER it’s a really old thing to say. Only really old characters or characters from the past say ‘da’ as ‘ja’ (and people who speak the dialect in Hiroshima, but this pun is a jab at how old Wolfram is XD). Yuuri then yells ‘Don’t say that!’

(6) When this story took place, Daisuke Matsuzaka was a player for the Seibu Lions (of

course XD). He then played for the Boston Red Sox from 2007-2012 (which is an awesome coincidence because that's Conrad's favorite team XD), and he now plays for the New York Mets. Anyway, he's awesome enough that he's won all sorts of awards and also played in Japan's Olympic team and the Red Sox offered him 3x his payroll with the Lions (\$52 million o.o) to get him to play for them. This has been your baseball trivia for this installment of The Taming of the Bear~

..*.*

It might be because it was just past noon, but the security inside the castle was comparatively lax and there weren't as many people walking around making it the perfect situation for criminal activities. I automatically start walking with sneaky steps.

"Wait, we aren't going to do anything bad."

That's right, we're going to go get rid of the monster living deep within the castle that is causing people... well, mainly me, trouble. My single life is waiting. Let's go, private room! Victory for a quiet night's sleep!

"Even if it isn't anything bad, if Günter were around this would have ended before it even started. You better be thankful for my generosity of going along with this childish plan without even telling that old, overprotective guardian of yours."

"Yeah, but this is 80% your fault anyway."

It was hard for me to criticize him aloud when I was standing there in a complete set of *borrowed* equipment.

There were two relaxed guards with a lot of free time standing at the entrance of the stone hall leading to the guest housing. It was sealed off with yellow and black rope. Somehow, it was very calm and peaceful.

"Oh, Your Majesty! Welcome to this filthy place!"

"Ah, yeah, I was thinking I would thank you two."

With a practiced movement, the former crown prince waved his hand at the two guards who suddenly straightened themselves upon seeing us.

"At ease. We're just taking a walk."

I don't know which one of us is the king.

There are several notices posted on the walls with bold and thick lettering. *No standing, enter, time!* Ah, so in other words 'Do Not Enter'? (1)

"I've heard that a monster is living here."

"A mon... ah! Yes there is something like that here, however its stronghold... no, sleeping quarters are much farther below and Mickey is patrolling beyond this point so there is no need for concern! We vow to not let it near the areas that everyone uses!"

Like he was taking the athlete's oath of fair play, the smaller soldier raises his arm and straightens his back even more. It seems that Mickey has earned an immense amount of trust here in The Great Demon Kingdom even though he's always just dancing around at the amphitheater in Tokyo Disney.

"About that, we actually came to see that monster because we heard people talking about it

so that's kind of why we're here."

"Huh!? Your Majesty wants to see *that*!? Ah but is His Excellency Conrart not with you...?"

Even though I asked in a modest way, the soldier's face abruptly changed color in shock. Considering the name that immediately came out of his mouth, it seems that the person responsible for me is Conrad, not Günter. It can't be helped. Although I'm hesitant to say that I'm good at this, after cracking my neck I try to give them an order as His Great and Overbearing Majesty the Demon King. However...

"I see. So that's what you think," Wolfram calmly interrupted me in a dreadful voice that sounded like it was echoing from the depths of the earth – a complete 180 from his normal Pretty Boy voice. It was vaguely reminiscent of his eldest brother. I've been calling them the three demon brothers who look nothing alike, but lately that opinion has been becoming 'the three brothers who you shouldn't let fool you by their appearance.'

"You disapprove if Conrart isn't with him. So you want to say that Yuuri and I are not allowed to walk freely about the castle. The both of you are saying that your master isn't Yuuri but Conrart!?"

"O-of course not!"

"No, that *is* what you're saying! No matter how insignificant, those thoughts will open the way to treason. How dare you plot to subvert the kingdom and place Lord Weller in power! The seeds of high treason must be culled immediately!"

"W-we would never think of something so absurd!"

The faces of the two guards pale and are so flustered I feel pity for them. The way they're frightened looks like they'll cling to the third son's legs at any moment and beg for forgiveness.

"The only master we revere is His Majesty the Demon King! Please forgive our careless words."

"Then I trust that you won't report to your superior officer Conrart that we secretly went to see the monster, right?"

"O-f course! Abso-lutely!" the older man assured us with strange pronunciation like he was an exchange student that has only been here for three months.

"By all means, please pass through here as Your Majesty wishes! By the way, I have poured my entire salary into 'His Excellency Wolfram will have his way with you' in Your Majesty's Spec-Oc!"

"Hey wait! What's that 'My Spec-Oc'?"

The man was sent flying by a kick from his partner with a 'don't talk about that!'

After fooling the guards and slipping by, the guest housing was unexpectedly silent.

The air was stale and damp, maybe from this place being sealed away for so long. With the smell, the cold air and the brightness, it was like the inside of a dirty refrigerator.

"Two bodies wander in..."

"Hey, lower your posture."

The character at the head of the party in dungeon crawling has a high chance of being suddenly attacked. And yet, I'm on the front line.

"Am I an essential party member in combat?"

"What are you planning to do if an enemy comes from behind?"

Oh right. In the real world there are surprise attacks and cowardly methods.

A faint sound comes in with the wind in the deathly silent hallway. It sounds like an infant blessed with a sense of rhythm is slapping the floor with a pillow.

"What's that? It sounds like light footsteps."

It's about twice as fast as my heart rate. It's getting closer. I take out my sole weapon, Windpipe No. 1. As usual, flowers popped out.

"The first monsters in a dungeon are always small and weak and like cute little onion-shaped creatures, right?"

"Yuuri, you idiot! Duck! Get down on the floor!"

"Shut up. The one who says idiot is the real idiot... eh!"

The giant enemy that came speeding around the corner and charged right at us wasn't small or weak or cute at all. Of course, it wasn't a slime-type creature either.

"M-Mickey!?"

- 's hand.

Four fat and round fingers. The white hand of 'Mouse M' that I know was running towards us on its middle and pointer finger. It's been magnified a few hundred times and is completely blocking up the hallway. No way! I would never have thought that Mickey was just his hand. His HP seems like it will be excessively high as well.

"Wh-what do we do, Wolf... whoa, there's one behind us too!?"

So it called for help, too.

When I turned around to get advice from my party member, the Mickey('s hand) behind us came running as well. It's taking up the entire hallway all the way to the ceiling with its 'plopplop' funny running style.

"This is like having Konishiki at the front gate and Akebono at the back gate!" (2)

"Don't just stand there! Get down, get down Yuuri! It was written on the notice wasn't it?"

So that 'Do Not Enter' sign meant *exactly* what was written on it?

The two of us crouch down at once and tried to go under the legs of the Mickeys (plural form). However, since I was a moment late, I crash right into the crotch of Mickey #1.

"Gah!"

If I ever got smacked in the face with a serve during beach volleyball, it would definitely feel like this. The shock hit me before the pain. My brain got bounced around and I felt like my memories would get messed up. Even Wolfram's voice sounded like it was coming from speakers underwater.

"I'm oka... Wol-f... ooph."

I thought for a moment we'd collapse on the stone floor, but the Mickey Pair surrounded us and we were cornered. Neither of them understood the concept of giving up so the both of them were forcefully pushing each other around. This scene with them grappling latched onto each other...

"Uh... looks like Mickey sumo..."

In the West: Mickey Noyama. In the East: Mickey Doyama. (3)

This isn't the time to be thinking up names for them. Hold up, if one of them is a girl mouse('s hand), then would this be flirting instead of wrestling? At any rate, if this continues for much longer us two weaklings will get suffocated. Even though my mouth and nose are completely smothered by fluffy white skin, I desperately try to call out to my fellow traveler.

“Wolf... we need... to some...how escape... below! Our chance is when they lift their hips... so on three... push your... body out!”

“I gphurghah!”

It seems like he wanted to say ‘I got it.’

Suddenly, they both stood up a little taller and the gap between their legs widened. With a pathetic shout, because my nose was squished, the third son and I drag our heads down. Every part of my face gets stretched out, but with a sound like pulling a huge turnip out of the ground my head comes free and I can breathe easier and my cheeks feel better.

“Thank god, we got...”

But wait, now we’re too far into the ground. Why is there no floor anymore!? It’s always one extreme or the other, there’s never anything that’s just right. There is no stone beneath the soles of my feet and I was moving according to the law of gravity. To put it simply, I’m falling!

“Hyaaaaaaaaagh!”

Leaving behind only a lasting shriek, we fall down to another floor.

I curl up my body expecting to hit a hard floor, but there is a strange elasticity to the spot I land. After bouncing two or three times, the ground finally steadies. The surface beneath my butt and palms was a cold lump like a gummi candy.

“... Wolfram? Wolf, hey are you alright? You don’t have any fatal injuries do you?”

“Damn it! I hurt my face.”

“Seriously!?”

In the dim light reminiscent of a refrigerator, I make my way over to my companion on my knees. If he gets a scar on that beautiful face of his I won’t be able to complain if he demands reparation. It’d be troublesome if he pressures me to marry him because his worth as a pretty boy went down.

Now that my eyes adjusted to the dim room, I was able to ascertain Lord von Bielefeld’s injuries.

“Oh, your nose just got bent a little upwards. If you pinch it with those magic-powered laundry clips of yours, it’ll go back to normal in two or three days.”

“Don’ bake i’ sound so easy. By nose ‘urts.”

Wolfram slammed his fist into the ground, probably to vent his anger. After a brief moment, the gummi-shaped, pale floor shook with a tremor. What are we sitting on?

“Hey uh, this moved.”

“It moved? Seriously, you are such a- as my fiance don’t you think that worrying more about the floor than my nose is a little too cold-hearted?”

My predetermined, follow-up phrase came out in a semi-monotone because I’m so sick of saying it.

“But we’re both boys. Anyway, is there a floor as squishy as this? This is definitely a futon storage room or a food stockroom or... eh!?”

The white gummi underneath me shook with a force that would cause the needle on a seismic meter to jump. We slide down a curve at reckless speeds and this time we really fall on our backs onto a hard stone floor. The small, round hill swells up and suddenly starts stretching out. It becomes even taller than us as we gaze at it in shock. We don’t even have time to cheer the white gummi on.

“Rather than a gummi...”

The creature standing before me was a gigantic kabuto beetle larva even bigger than a human. It had a milky white body and a dark brown nose and it had short little leg-like things quivering around creepily. It's not quite a caterpillar and it's not quite a pillbug either. Whatever angle you look at it from, it's a 'larva'.

There is a sticky liquid dripping from its mouth. I wonder if it's elatedly drooling from finding its afternoon snack.

“What is this thing!?” the pretty boy yells in an alto voice as he wipes the drool off of his stomach and scoots away while still on his backside. It seems he's not very good with dealing with irregular creatures like super gigantic kabuto beetle larva and sand bears with strange-colored panda fur.

I myself am not very good with dealing with animals of ridiculous sizes, but inside my brain that's sounding the emergency alert, there is a part of me that's steadily calculating how much this thing would be worth if it was a giant stag beetle larva. And there are about 14 of these bugs standing up making weird sounds. (4)

“Awesome... it's stag beetle heaven...”

“Don't daze off, Yuuri! We're going to get eaten! They're going to eat us!”

Scattering around that soupy lemon jelly, the larvae swoop down on me. My field of vision becomes milky white and I am once again plunged into suffocation hell.

(1) Yuuri still can't read very well. I'm taking a guess that it really says 'No standing, entering or loitering' but we'll never know XD

(2) Konishiki Yasokichi and Akebono Tarou are both retired sumo wrestlers from Hawaii. Konishiki Yasokichi is the heaviest wrestler ever and Akebono Tarou is also considered one of the heaviest and tallest wrestlers ever. Fun fact, when foreign sumo wrestlers enter the sport, they are given 'shikona' or wrestler names in Japanese so those aren't their birth names. Japanese wrestlers also adopt a 'shikona' but they are not required to do so unless they reach a certain division level.

(3) East and West are the sides of the wrestling ring in sumo similar to the red and blue corners in boxing. Extra info: the wrestlers are all divided between East and West in each rank/division with the #1 wrestler being East, #2 West, #3 East, and it continues as such. Because they are divided this way, the East side has an advantage and it is the more prestigious. Can you tell I really like sumo? Craptons more than baseball anyway XD

(4) Kabuto beetles and stag beetles are popular children's pets in Japan and are also relatively cheap as you can just go out and catch one. The stag beetles live longer so they're more expensive. The *giant* stag beetles are also popular with adults, however, and depending on the quality and size of the stag beetle, they can be worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Day Two

I needed GPS to get around my own bizarre castle.

Even if that can't exist because there aren't any satellites orbiting this planet, I'd at least be able to figure out where I was and how to escape if I had a decent map.

"I'd even be able to find the back road shortcuts during rush hour."

I want a Tadataka Inou for The Great Demon Kingdom. (1)

"You know where we are. We dropped down while trying to get away from Mickey so this is obviously the bottom floor of the guest housing."

"And a monster's den."

Wolfram and I were squatted down in a corner of the room hugging our knees. We made it through a tense night and the morning light is shining through the hole above our heads. A pile of human bones is glowing a bluish white in the shade right next to us.

Although we reached the creature's lair like we wanted, the courage to catch even a ball thrown by Terahara disappeared somewhere because the monsters were so scary. After getting leaned on by the larvae, the two of us let out shrieks that can't be put into writing and completely gave up. (2)

Either because the weird sounds we made scared them or they were planning to dry us out for food storage, they didn't try to eat us right away and simply left us alone after cutting off our escape route.

"You're a wimp to the very core if you end up pathetically stranded in your own castle."

"... Yeah, yeah... but you know I got sniffed up and down and my clothes got licked..."

"I did too." Wolf scowls in displeasure as well.

"I wonder if they were checking if we'd be tasty."

"Who knows."

"I wonder if they're planning on eating us as their coming-of-age party food once they turn into adults."

"Who knows."

"I wonder if I should change my name to Yuuri Hors D'oeuvre."

"Stop."

The reason Wolfram is so calm on the surface is that the larva spit out threads and wrapped themselves in cocoons halfway through the night. The weird capsules with white, yellow and brown stripes were almost the size of station wagons. Around twelve of them are scattered about vertically and horizontally in the cramped space. As we absentmindedly sit on the floor like in gym class, we can't even tell where the walls of the room are.

On top of that, there are bright red eyes shining out of the cocoons. They were all looking at us with their sparkling eyes as if saying 'we're watching you.'

"Only a rock climber would be able to get up these walls but if we just wait here we'll end up like those guys."

The skull on top of the mountain of bones like a star on a christmas tree was sending us a pitying gaze from deep within its empty eye sockets. The last time a skull felt pity for me was

during a dare in preschool.

That time I got so scared I wet my pants a little, but now I'm 16 so situations like these are nothing!

"Is that bravado?"

"Don't even. It's because you told them not to report to Conrad that no one came looking for us last night."

"If you hadn't said you wanted to defeat the monster in the guest housing I wouldn't be here."

"No, even *before* that... let's stop. It'll never end. It was my mistake to not gather any data on our enemy beforehand."

That's right. Collecting data is important in any situation. It was stupid to set off on a monster hunting adventure without gathering any intelligence. And now there was a sparkling Antares constellation in front of us drawn out with shiny red eyes in cocoons.

"Maybe we should try shouting again."

"We ran out of things to yell."

I had sung all the baseball team songs. I even sang the enemy team songs of Daiei, Osaka Kintetsu and even Rokkou Oroshi. My throat was so scratchy I was close to begging 'water, please water...'

"I'm thirsty."

"Ah crap! I was trying to forget!"

The choices we had were to become dried food, get eaten by the insects after they hatched or our original objective, defeating them while they were immobilized.

"... Just maybe... while they're cocooned..."

I unsteadily stand up, twist Windpipe No. 1 and draw the blade. I step towards the capsule within reach and try swinging at it, careful not to meet its gaze.

The blade chipped on the third swing.

"... It's tough."

"Something always goes wrong with whatever you do."

That's none of your business.

Thinking that maybe I could reach the hole in the ceiling if I climbed up on a vertical cocoon, I try climbing the tallest striped capsule.

I fell twenty times.

"... It's slippery."

"You can tell just by looking at it."

"Come on, Wolf! Stop sitting there daydreaming and think up a genius plan! Don't you want to get out of here? Are you okay with dying here!?"

"Sign this before we die."

He takes out a piece of folded, light green paper from his jacket pocket and holds out his favorite pen. It's a document that I can't understand with my limited language ability. However, I can understand the short phrase at the top.

"Marr..iage...Regis- hey! This is a life or death situation!"

"That's exactly why this is important."

All the strength drains out of my body from the ridiculousness and I sink to the floor. Of course the room is taken up by all the cocoons and there isn't a spot for me to sit properly. At

first, I had wanted to be as far away from the monsters as possible and hugged my legs to my body. However, human nerves are a strange thing and can adapt to any situation. After a half a day passed and there was no development with the cocoons, I got used to my surroundings and ended up calmly leaning against the white, yellow and brown capsules. I mean, they're heavy and won't move and their surface is smooth and cold so they are unexpectedly pleasing to the touch.

Besides, I was tired of being curled up and afraid. Having nothing else to do, I ended up playing a ridiculous word game with my companion. Even though we're playing a completely normal game, I end up just saying a bunch of baseball terms and the words that come back at me are weird animal names that I've never heard of before. In the end, we ended up playing this incomprehensible game with the mutual understanding that it was absolutely ridiculous.

"Base running."

"Gujibokigodral."

"Lions Express."

"Sugabaniyacop."

"P? What kind of animal is that? P, huh? Poten-... hey wait. This cocoon is shaking."

I heard the sound of air leaking from the capsule I was leaning on. When I hurriedly moved around to the front of it, the eyes were clearly blinking.

"This is bad. Its Color Timer is blinking. Ah! There's a hole here! That's weird. There wasn't even a scratch on that other one I tried to cut. Hey, do you have anything to plug this up with? Like clay or gum or some rice." (3)

Wolfram let out a hysterical yell and covered his ears with his hands.

"Huh!? I must be hearing things. There's no way you're trying to save what's in that cocoon."

"You heard right. I said 'let's seal up this hole'."

"For what!? You came here to the guest housing to get rid of these things didn't you? Despite that, your plan failed and we ended up in a dangerous situation. One less enemy is better. The chances for our survival will go up."

"But-"

I don't want to admit it, but this time the spoiled prince is right. In order for us to not become hors d'oeuvres for a coming of age ceremony and get out of this room alive, we need to kill each insect(?) the instant it comes out of its hard cocoon. As long as we don't know what kind of insect will come out of the cocoon, getting rid of as many as possible beforehand is a good plan.

90 is better than 100. 11 is better than 12...

"Man, even if 12 becomes 11 it doesn't change the fact that we're at a disadvantage! I don't want to use that stingy plan of getting rid of one of them while we can. I mean, he managed to get to the cocoon stage. It'd be unfair if he was the only one who didn't make it all the way, right? Well, we don't know what kind of bug he's gonna be, but maybe he's a species that will buzz around in the air and journey to some far off country one day."

The deep part of my brain with a high IQ knows that's not what's going to happen. I always end up wrong when I let myself get carried away by my emotions. Even giving up baseball in middle school was due to my emotions rather than my rationality.

Even so.

“It’d be too cruel if he was the only one who couldn’t fly around in the blue sky and see a far off world. The laws of nature might be cruel like that, but if someone just helps out a little now they might be able to do something. That’s why I’m going to help! What’s up with this hole? I wonder if it’ll be like covering up a little bald spot.”

I scoop up some of the yellow mucus spread around and try plastering some over the hole. A thin film covers the hole for a few seconds, but it quickly oozes off. The shining eyes are steadily becoming weaker and there were pauses in the cocoon’s shaking.

“Hey, hey now, just hold on a little longer. You’re going to regret it for the rest of your life if you die before seeing the face of your hors d’oeuvre.”

Staring at my fingertips, Wolfram let out an exasperated sigh that I feel like I’ve heard somewhere before.

“I’ve never met a wimp quite like you.”

“Don’t call me a wimp.”

“But...”

It seems like he decided against continuing that sentence.

He tears the paper he was holding into several pieces and scoops up a huge handful of mucus and smears it over the hole. After carefully making sure there weren’t any bubbles, he keeps piling up some more. Eventually the hole is securely plugged up and the air stops leaking out.

“Yes! Even the Color Timer looks healthier! Quick thinking pays off, Wolfram... but why so suddenly...?”

“People say that wimps have five minute souls.”

“No one says that.”

The two of us look away from each other to hide our embarrassed grins.

I knock on the cocoon’s shell five times and tell it to come out safely. I don’t know what species these guys are, but that doesn’t mean they’ll do wrong by us after we did them a favor.

- (1) Tadataka Inou was a cartographer. He is famous for doing a survey of Japan and creating the very first map of Japan based on modern surveying techniques.
- (2) Another baseball player! Hayato Terahara played for the Daiei Hawks.
- (3) The Color Timer is from Ultraman and it is basically a warning light on an Ultra’s body somewhere (usually the chest). Anyway, it blinks when they’re running out of energy.

Day Three

I was suffering from lack of sleep and hunger, but the absolute worst part was that my thirst had reached its peak.

"I haven't drunk anything since the day before yesterday."

"Hearing that hoarse voice is making me even thirstier."

"But if I don't say anything I don't know if I'm alive or dead."

There is still some lemon jelly fluid that those things spit out on the stone floor in front of me. It's so viscous that it's not drying out. It's definitely a liquid though.

"... Hey, if it was a choice between that and your urine, which would you drink?"

"I want some chilled, sparkling wine."

"No, like I said, it's either that yellow stuff or your yellow stuff."

"Malt liquor over ice would be good too."

"... You're just naming stuff that's urine colored."

Since there are people doing that for health-related reasons even if they haven't fallen into a dangerous situation like this, there's no way it would be bad for your body. I should just resolve myself to bite this bullet and use this opportunity to add to my 'man points.' In life, everything is an experience.

"Ahh, but I'm not even sweating anymore."

It's already too late. Luckily, I had lost my chance.

Things seem to be going well inside the cocoons and about an hour ago I heard some small sounds. Chicks are the ones that crack through their eggshells with their beaks...

"I wonder if you also call it '*hatching*' when it's a cocoon."

"Who is '*Hatching*'? A man?" Wolfram asked with a drawl. (1)

He's pretty tired too.

"Your Majesty."

It appears that even my ears are starting to get affected by my dehydration. I can hear a voice I've missed.

"Your Majesty, are you there?"

"Am I hearing things?"

"Y-You chea... jerk." Wolfram's ready to collapse.

There was a commotion above our heads and the footsteps of several groups of people were coming and going.

"Thank goodness! Your Majesty, you fell into the burrow didn't you. Do you have any serious injuries?"

"Conrad!? Is that really Conrad!? Seriously!? You're not a counterfeit, right!?"

"I wonder what a counterfeit of me would be like."

Lord Weller was peering down at us from about 10 meters up. After seeing his usual charming smile, I feel like this whole situation isn't such a big deal anymore. I even feel like spending two nights in a den of squirming monsters was like sleeping in a stable.

"I apologize. I would have liked to find you sooner, but for some reason the information was complicated. Because you both disappeared together, Günter was running around half-crazed

shouting that you had run off to elope. Although, since everyone has recognized your engagement there wouldn't be any need to elope... Your Majesty? Are you in pain?"

"I-I'm okay. I'm just hungry and thirsty."

Since I'm so dehydrated I don't have to worry about crying.

"Hurry up and throw down a rope! The situation is serious!" Wolfram yelled upwards after suddenly getting his energy back. "They're about to be born!"

"Eh, Wolf you-? No way."

Lord Weller, you incredible idiot.

"No, *I'm* not giving birth! Unfortunately neither is Yuuri. We're both men! These insects are about to emerge. There are some cocoons with cracks in them already."

Conrad mouthed 'That's bad.' In any case, we're in a huge pinch and I really want him to lower a ladder down to us. The other men peering down at us are all frowning with the same 'That's bad' look.

"Your Majesty, I have a favor I'd like to ask of you."

"Okay, I'll hear it. Ah! Are you blackmailing me!? I thought that you of all people wouldn't be so underhanded."

"That's not it. We'll send down water and food so can you stay down there a little bit longer until they come out of their cocoons?"

"Sure, if you give us some food and water we can hang out here a little bit... eh!? Why me?"

"They are a very delicate species. The moment they leave the nest is particularly important so if possible, I'd like for you to help them."

Those things!? Those super huge larvae are a delicate species!?

"But, they sniffed and licked me and Wolf, you know!?"

"That's wonderful. That's for the best."

"Huh!? I don't want to die by getting eaten while I'm so you-"

"They're coming out!" one of the men peering down at us shouted excitedly.

Startled, I looked around and saw two or three of the cocoons had broken open and yellow figures inside were slowly standing up. Wolfram and I were struck speechless and we had both frozen in place halfway in raising our hands to point.

"Th-this is..."

"Your Majesty, Wolf, hurry and put these on."

We promptly picked up the objects he threw down to us and saw that they were reddish brown, knitted caps. They even have tags on them. 'Made In Gwendal'

"... Made..." The phrasing is wrong if they wanted to say that Gwendal made these, but it's too late to point that out now. After I pull it snugly over my head, there are ears on top.

"B-Bear ears?"

There are shouts of 'cute!' from ten-odd meters above us. Please stop. The third son is hundreds of times more worthy of that than me. He's the catholic school pretty boy.

With an explosive sound like a huge thud, another one of the mysterious creatures breaks out of a cocoon. The shocked calls above are now 'super cute!'

"Bearbees are really cute!"

"Aaaah, bearbees are *so.cu~~~te!*"

Bearbees? Standing in front of the two of us with our caps with ears was some strange

creature whose upper half of their body and their legs and feet were like a teddy bear and their feelers and abdomen were yellow and black like a honeybee. It's like a real... no, this thing is a real creature too, but... it has a build like an Asian black bear in the mountains and it has transparent insect wings on its back. With a body like that, can it really fly with those thin wings?

“.....”

Stepping up to the two of us who are still speechless, the bearbee swings its right arm around.

We're gonna get eaten! My emotions almost synchronize with salmon hunted by brown bears, but it didn't try to attack Wolfram and me. It stands with its right arm raised as if swearing an oath and its round and cute eyes glisten.

“Nogisu!”

“Eh?”

Nogisu is a type of caliper, right... this isn't an engineering room so there aren't any here. (2)
But wait, is that the sound it makes!?

“L-like Grave of Nogisu?” Maybe they'll let us off with a good pun? (3)



As Bearbee #1 walks around to the other cocoons with a boing-boing sound, it passed right below the hole in the ceiling. And then, after giving one last regretful look behind it, it raised both of its hands to the sky and flew away. Of course, it didn't say 'whoosh!' as it went. The spectators started clapping and it suddenly became tumultuous applause. Some of them were so overcome with emotion they had started crying and there was snot dripping out of their noses.

Meanwhile, the cocoons were steadily breaking open one after another and Bearbee #3 and #4 came to greet us. By the time Bearbee #8 took up his pose, the two of us had gotten used to the situation and were laughing and saying things like 'Good morning, nogisu' and 'Have a nice trip, nogisu.'

The very last one was the cocoon we had to give emergency medical attention to. The capsule broke open with a low-key noise and Bearbee #12 stuck its face out.

"Whoa!" A shout of joy rose up from the peanut gallery and everyone started whispering to each other.

"It's a queen bearbee."

"I never thought I'd see a queen bearbee."

"What an elegant design. Yeah, she'll live a long time."

Well, with my aesthetic sense, it just looks like a teddy bear that was cobbled together with random scraps of cloth. And an all-pink patchwork at that.

The queen bearbee gracefully makes her way to us, slowly raises her arm and says, "Thank you, nogisu."

"Hm? Uh, you're welcome, nogisu!"

After that, she pushed Wolfram and I down with all her might and rubbed her wet nose all over us before flying off.

Construction sites and her butt are probably the only things that look good in yellow and black stripes. Around her sexy waist...

"Ah! The marriage registration form is stuck to her."

(1) For some reason, Yuuri says hatching in Japanese (hashiuchi). This can also be a name in Japanese if it's written in kanji. That's why Wolfram got confused ^_^

(2) Nogisu is the name for vernier calipers. It's a borrowed word from another language, but I'm not sure which.

(3) The pun here being on 'Grave of Fireflies' (Hotaru no Haka > Nogisu no Haka)

* * * * *

I finally managed to get to the next floor after shakily climbing up a ladder. I had to stay sitting for a while from dehydration and dizziness, but I could mostly taste the drink that was handed to me.

“Hah... But it was good we didn’t get eaten.”

“Bearbees are not carnivorous,” Conrad said.

“But there were bones in the corner of the... huh?”

When I peer over the edge of the hole, I see that the skulls are clinging to the broken cocoons.

“Those are Flying Skeletons on the brink of death. Bearbee cocoons are full of calcium so they do that to replenish their energy.”

“Wow... It looks like a painting of Hell at first glance.”

After drinking an entire tankard, Wolfram gives a low groan and leans against the wall.

“I’d never have thought that the things living in the guest housing were phantom bearbees.”

“Phantom?”

“When I first heard that bearbees had laid eggs in Blood Pledge Castle I was also surprised. They are a species that some say are extinct, after all. That’s why we said that they were monsters in order to keep poachers and collectors and other unsavory types away. Even so, right after the eggs were laid the parents died.”

Ah, so that’s why they mistook us for their parents and sniffed and licked us. It’s lucky that larvae have bad eyesight. If we were found out, we’d definitely have been smothered to death.

After he saw off the researchers who were steadily thanking the king and former prince, Lord Weller presses his nose against my shoulder.

“Like I thought.”

“What?”

“The deciding factor was smell. You used paint from Duboss, right? The one with the horrible smell.”

“Wolf definitely used it. You’re not saying that that excrement is...”

“Something like a mineral can be extracted from the feces of adult bearbees. It’s a rare and unprocurable, top-quality product nowadays. But Your Majesty, thanks to Wolf a new queen bearbee was born and, since they’ve eluded complete extinction, we might be able to make that paint in our own kingdom next year.”

I heard something I couldn’t ignore in that mini-speech so I hurriedly voice my concerns.

“They’re coming next year too!?”

“Yes, that’s a given. Once they go around to several places and areas with ideal climates, they return to the same place after a year and lay their eggs. In this case, that queen will definitely return since she believes her parents are here in this castle.”

“Parents?”

After giving us a good-guy smile that you absolutely can’t criticize, Conrad points at me and his little brother.

“I’m not sure which one she thinks is which, however.”

The Great Demon Kingdom bearbee father.

The Great Demon Kingdom bearbee mother.

“Eh?”

At that moment, an image of a patchwork teddy bear or knitted bear or whatever putting on a pair of special insect wings and dancing a line dance pops up in my head. Of course, Lord Wolfram von Bielefeld and I were in the center with ostrich wings.

“EHHH!?”

“Yuuri, you ended up with yet another child you’re not related to. This is why I call you a flirt!”

“Shut up. You’re a mom or dad too you know!? But you know, I wonder which one is more awesome – a mother bearbee or Mother of Ultra? I guess it’s Mother of Ultra since she protects the universe...” (1)

And that is how Yuuri and Wolfram became the parents in spirit of the rare and protected species the bearbees, tosa.

“This doesn’t mean you can just live in my room you know!? Stop drawing shigaraki tanuki and saying it’s me. Oh, and stop arbitrarily giving me B-cups!”

(1) Ultraman reference. Ultraman is a tokusatsu show, or a live-action show with a bunch of special effects. Power Rangers is a tokusatsu show if you need an example ^-^ Mother of Ultra is, as it sounds, the mother of Ultraman. Or at least, one of them. There’s so many. It’s confusing XD But, she’s the mother of the one called Ultraman Taro.

* * * * *

With an unbecoming blush painting his cheeks, Lord von Christ closed his eyes as if seeing a dream. He’s probably imagining his master frolicking with bearbees.

“Ahh, His Majesty and those bearbees that are always at the top of the voting polls of rare creatures you want to hug and go to sleep with. It is a scene so adorable that it seems as if it is not of this world...”

“Certainly. It-certainly-is-very-adorable-however.”

Showing that his comment was from the heart, the editor leans his body forward over the table. While Günter was talking, there were a few parts where the editor nodded with exquisite timing and made appropriate comments and he listened with great interest until the very end.

“If we wrote down such a heart-warming anecdote as this, it’s assured that the ladies who are normally weak against pretty boys and animals will be writhing in joy. There will definitely be a wild enthusiasm for bearbees amongst the ladies! Although...”

“Although?”

Günter was suddenly brought back to reality at Badwik's last word. He had been picturing a delusion five times wilder than reality with a queen bearbee flying off into the sunset and Yuuri's profile with eyes wet with tears he wasn't aware of. The credits were just about to roll.

"I-believe-that-a-story-loaded-wit
h-charm-will-please-the-audience-and-heal-their-hearts-and-whatnot-however.
But-you-know-but-you-know, I feel like they are yearning for something a bit different."

"Something besides charm?"

"That's right. We in the industry believe that the women of this kingdom are a bit tired of the same old things being repeated every day." Badwik clasped his small hands together and brought them up to near his mouth in a feminine manner.

"I understand that peaceful and stable days are the best of blessings. But lately, there are times when I roll over and look at my husband and say 'oh, he's an old man too.' Yeah yeah, my boyfriend is the same way. He wasn't like that before."

What a bizarre way of speaking. Günter was sucked into the mood, unable to close his mouth.

"I don't feel that spark we had when we first met, yeah yeah, there's no spark. I feel like things are hopeless when I think that these boring days will go on forever. What's that thing? Something like a thrill I've never felt before. Yeah, that's it. I don't have enough excitement. I want to experience a burning love where I put my life on the line just once! That's right, a love affair with a passionate and dangerous partner. A sad love story like in a coming of age play. I'd want to experience that even if it's just a fantasy.... Something-along-those-lines-however."

Quickly reverting back to a capable editor from his sudden solo performance, he knocked on the goat leather book with his fist.

"They want to experience a thrill that commonplace, everyday life can't give them even if it's just in a novel. Falling in love with a dangerous and attractive partner different from the mediocre spouses and how it would feel to be extremely sought after.

The-Central-Literary-Institute-of-The-Great-Demon-Kingdom-and-I-believe-that-we-can-gain-the-f
emale-reader's-support-by-simulating-that-pleasure-for-them-however."

"... I wonder what a dangerous, attractive and passionate partner and burning love that you risk your life for is... like... wait, are you asking me to write that!? Please wait, I am not Lady Celi, you know? I have no such things written in my diary..."

"To-be-honest-a-commonplace-plot-is-fine-no-a-classic-format-is-just-fine.
But-you-know-the-problems-is-how-much-the-reader-can-empathize-with-the-characters'-perso
nalities-and-actions-however."

A gleam sparkled in Badwik's eyes that was so clever it couldn't be seen as a salesman's weapon. Feeling as if he was being begged by a child, Günter starts digging through the shelves of his memories.

"... A classic format with a dangerous and attractive partner and a passionate love... was there anything in my diary like that..? Dangerous and attractive, risking your life... oh!"

The search in his brain ended and all of the matching data strings were extracted. The tutor turned almost-novelist slapped his knee and stood up enthusiastically to search the bookshelf behind him.

"Here it is, here it is! It is a somewhat old story, but it is the perfect tale. It is from over ten

years ago so it is completely different from what is in the diary, however...”

Well it *is* a related data string. It can't be helped if it's a little old.

Romero and Argent

Our kingdom's classical literature has many heroic military records and historical descriptions of the glory of the demons, but among them is a story that moves both men and women considered to be one of The Great Demon Kingdom's three great tragedies.

This incident... no, this shocking affair has shouldered the burden of carrying on the love story of a man and woman from the most dreadful of the three great tragedies.

Good children should not try this at home.

On occasion, there is the danger that friendship can destroy you. Even so, you cannot run away on your own. While your partner believes that you are a friend...

Ah, I have goosebumps.

*On the shore the storks
Perched amid the pine tree tops
Charm my roving gaze;
For a thousand years, I ween,
Storks and pines fast friends have been.(1)*

A blue ocean and a white sandy beach.

The Karbelnikoff region, containing The Great Demon Kingdom's most beautiful scenery, is also bolstered by the regional lord's love of numbers and he is proud of the vast income from tourism.

The man who governs this region, Lord Densham von Karbelnikoff, had a petite figure for an adult demon male. For that reason, when he is summoned to Blood Pledge Castle in the royal capital for meetings of the aristocratic representatives across the nation, he is always sat at the very front. Because he is sitting in the little children's seat, he absolutely cannot doze off.

He has the flaming red hair from his mother's side of the family and slightly swollen looking, light blue eyes. He is a man that loves his nation, quick money-making schemes and profit so the more difficult a financial reform, the more passionate he is. He loves birds more than cats or dogs and he always has a chicken on his lap. The chicken currently receiving his love is a white and dark-brown speckled rooster. It had its eyes closed in ecstasy as it was having its back scratched with groomed nails.

"Densham!"

Faster than the owner of the room can even turn in her direction, Lady Anissina von Karbelnikoff entered, destroying the tranquil atmosphere of the early afternoon. She had a gallant and loud walk that could not be considered ladylike by any standard.

"Densham! How dare you do such a shameless thing without even informing me!?"

"What are you talking about, my sister? Minchey is frightened because you're so noisy."

All of his pets are named Minchey. This rooster is the 19th.

"There is no point in feigning ignorance! Mother has already confessed."

Confessing is dangerous.

Placing her hands on her narrow hips with an ever-deepening harsh expression, Anissina lifts her light blue eyes. She is normally a beauty the complete opposite of cute and voluptuous so when she is angry it is all the more dreadful.

"You have been trying to get me married."

"Oh really, you're getting ahead of yourself, my sister. It is an engagement, not a marriage. An *engagement*."

"They are both the same! Have I ever joked about when I wanted to marry? I am always declaring that I am living only to use my talent and devotion to further the prosperity of the demons. I unfortunately have no time to devote to some random, worthless man. In the first place, unintelligent and uncivilized men have no right to choose one of us dignified women to rely on them. If they want a spouse so badly, they should get in line and wait."

It was an outrageously one-sided ideology, but no one attempted to interrupt.

"Honestly, my sister. I don't want for you to rely on a husband. However, if you were to marry the Rochefort's second son..."

Densham's gaze wandered about and his index finger was moving slightly as if calculating with a slide rule. His mouth had turned into an ominous smile as his brain switched into don't-count-your-chickens-before-they're-hatched mode.

“You can do your research or experiments or immerse yourself in living that life you were talking about while you’re there, but if you stay married for five years, one sixth of the Rochefort’s silver mine’s mining rights will automatically become yours. If you break up with the other party and come back, then those steady resources will even come to us von Karbelnikoffs who are mostly reliant on income from tourism.”

“Oh, so it is one of those stereotypical political marriages that you never hear of nowadays! Unbelievable! To think that this shallow man is my brother. I will end up laughing before I grieve. Oha, ohahahaha, ohahahahaha!”

“Oh it’s so nice that you’re having fun. Your brother will end up laughing as well. Ohahaohaha, ohahahaha!”

Brother and sister have the same odd laugh. Their hair and eye color are identical. These are the few similarities that their genes have brought about.

“Even so, the von Rochefort family!? Are they not the lineage of the infamous Brutality King?”

“Ohahaha. If you want, the nephew of the current head of the Roberski family is fine too. The fishing rights and distribution will always be attractive to nobility.”

Minchey turns his head to the side in apparent confusion as he was getting scratched around his comb.

“What a foolish and vulgar thought! If you want money so much, then you can just go marry some other noble and take over their house instead of me.”

“No, I wouldn’t be good for that, my sister. I’m not as good looking as you are and I don’t really have the looks to attract the men.”

No one said he had to marry a man.

“At any rate, you’re beautiful enough that if you would just keep your mouth shut you would be able to deceive any man. After all, if they find out your true nature like Gwendal did, no one will ever fall in lov-... Uhoha! Minchey! What’s wrong!?”

The rooster sitting on Densham’s narrow lap jumped off as if it went insane. It rhythmically moves its head up and down as it pecks at its owner’s arms and stomach.

As Anissina changed her weird von Karbelnikoff family laugh to a spine-chilling derisive one, she swung around a pipe as thick as a pinky finger. It was the magic-powered harmonic birdcall device she just invented recently. It emitted a sound wave of a frequency that humans could not hear and controlled birds’ emotions. However, its sole flaw is that it can only aggravate them. The more it is played the more the target becomes enraged. She had given up on the device as it seemed that it would only be of use in cockfights, but it appears there was an unexpected use for it.

“St-st-st-stop it, Minchey! Ow ow that hurts! Ahhhh, but I love roosters who are so brave!”

(1) This is another verse from *The Tosa Diary*. I explained what that was in Day 1 of The

Taming of the Bear and also where I got the official English translation from. Once again, a bit artistic, but at this point the main character was sailing past this area with pine trees and a bunch of storks in those trees. He didn't know how old the trees were or how many there were so he composed this verse. A less artistic version would be: As I look out over the storks sitting on the tops of the pine trees, it seems as if they consider those pines to be longtime friends.

* * * * *

"I had an idea."

"Ugh..."

After having ridden on horseback all day for various matters within the territory he inherited from his father, Lord von Voltaire, exhausted, tried closing the door to his room along with a prayer.

Timidly, he opens the door again.

"What is wrong with you? It is fidgety to open and close doors like that."

As expected, she is there.

No matter how you look at it, she is there. No matter how many times you look, she is there. She is sticking out of the desk drawer.

To more specifically describe it, his childhood friend and knitting teacher who on one hand is one of The Great Demon Kingdom's Three Great Witches and is the woman feared as The Red Devil on the other, Lady Anissina von Karbelnikoff, is sticking out from the desk in Gwendal's private room.

"... Why is the top half of your body sticking out of the drawer?"

"How dare you not greet your knitting teacher after not having seen her in a long time!"

Completely ignoring her own impoliteness, she squares her shoulders.

As for Gwendal, this is not the time for saying 'good evening.' How exactly did she sneak into another person's room!? On top of that, how did she get here from the von Karbelnikoff territory when it is a long journey for even a horse!?

"No one informed me that I had a visitor. Not even any of the gatekeepers. No one saw your carriage or even that dubious magic-powered kite of yours."

"Upsy-daisy~"

With an old person's shout – appropriate for her age – Anissina stepped down to the floor. It is a drawer for petty documents so it is not all that large. No matter how petite she is, squeezing herself into that drawer would be difficult. Which means that there is some sort of mechanism installed deep within the drawer.

"I joined a dimensional travel route. Between my clothing shelves and the desk in this room. With this, travel between Karbelnikoff Castle and Voltaire Castle will take an instant."

"Wait, there's no way that can be easily..."

"Of course the common researcher would never be able to achieve this in their entire life! It took even me an entire half a year to develop and I then needed a year to implement it, after all. Ugh, I am not interested in the least in explaining the details of the theory. It would be beyond

your power of comprehension.”

Until yesterday it was a completely normal writing desk. As if he were touching a tumor, Gwendal pulled the handle of the drawer with only his fingertips. The dark brown wood grain moves.

“Do not try to test it. If a man as unnecessarily large as yourself stepped in, you would absolutely get stuck on the way. If that happens, the end result would be that you would never come back. You would drift around forever in A Space.”

What is A Space? And where did she put the frog paperweight that was in the drawer? The back of the green object was smooth and it was his favorite. Cold winter air and a smell that he was familiar with come flowing out of the other dimension in the desk.

“The smell of the balcony.”

“You cannot relax and take your time though. I will say that in advance.”

In the room of her familiar test subject, Anissina began to prepare tea as if she did so regularly. He does not mind if he calls someone in to give orders, but Gwendal does not like it when servants enter his private room. It would be easy to say that it is because he hates people, but there is another reason for this. (1)

“They seem to have multiplied, the knitted creatures... and they are strangely unattractive.”

Angry words float into his mind, but Gwendal was well aware how dangerous saying them was after having been associated with her for so long. If you did not want to anger The Red Devil, staying quiet was the best course of action.

“Did you hear of Densham’s conspiracy?”

“Conspiracy... It’s just simple marriage negotiations, isn’t it?”

“No, it is obviously a conspiracy!” Anissina asserted roughly as she shoved a cup at Gwendal. The black tea filled to the brim swayed as it fell into his hands.

“... Ow.”

It was hot. He endured through it. But, it was still hot. If he dropped the tea cup now, ‘So you cannot drink my tea?’ would soon follow. Resolving to endure burns, he waits for his companion to speak.

“Densham is jealous of my excessive talent.”

What? I don’t think that’s quite it. Gwendal is close to her older brother as well, but her brother lives by an odd sense of values and it is hard to believe he would envy anyone. Although the man named Lord Densham von Karbelnikoff loved money and chickens, he never desired magical power or beauty.

“I’m not sure-”

“No, I am certain! He is envious of my contributions to the kingdom from my intellect and magical power. Well, it is understandable. Even though we are siblings related by blood, the only talent he has is gathering money.”

That is the most important part of government finances.

“Even so, should I gracefully allow myself to be pursued? There is no time in the short life of a demon to spend avoiding worthless men. And then I had an idea!”

Nothing good will come from the Mad Magicalist thinking deeply about something. But he did not want to thoughtlessly interrupt now.

“If I give a half-hearted refusal, he will keep on suggesting such things in the future. I need to

make myself *very* clear this time. If I make him pay this time around, then I will never have to worry about this sort of stupid problem again.”

“By ‘stupid problem’ do you mean marriage?”

“Of course.”

Ah, then that means that Lord von Voltaire’s mother did something stupid three times.

Despite his childhood friend’s sigh, Anissina brings her drink to her mouth to satisfy her thirst before giving an intellectual laugh.

“After thinking for a full night I came up with the best way to do so. I call it Operation ‘Romero and Argent.’”

“Romero and Argent? What’s that?”

“Eh!?”

They have been together for roughly over a hundred years, but this is the first time he has seen Anissina so surprised. As usual she was not charming in the least, but the sight of her with her eyebrows risen, her clear blue eyes widened, and her fingertips pressed to her lips is a marked difference from her usual self. Although, it is only a moment before her naturally rosy lips spit poison.

“You don’t know!? Romero and Argent!? It is an extremely famous drama considered to be one of The Great Demon Kingdom’s three great tragedies. This is unbelievable, to think that someone would come of age without reading the classics. This is why people ridicule you for having superficial knowledge.”

“The only one who ridicules me is you... Anyway, what sort of story is Romero and...”

“Argent.”

“Yeah, Argent.”

“W-well it is one of the many tear-inducing tales of love gone wrong. Two lovers unable to be together hated the fiancées chosen by their parents and drink poison so they will be able to be together after death at the very least. A promise, you see.”

It does not seem to be something that the Mad Magicalist would be interested in.

“By reading that story, I came to understand how pointless love was and that true happiness for a woman was definitely not living with a lover but utilizing the talents she was born with to their fullest to contribute to society. Honestly, drinking poison for a man... there is a limit even for stupidity. It irritates me no matter how many times I read it.”

Most likely, her impressions after reading are so in the minority they are heresy.

“However at the end of the story, the entire family surrounds the fallen Romero and Argent and repents. ‘If it was going to turn out like this, we would not have forced them to marry the fiancées their parents chose’ and ‘we were stupid,’ that sort of thing. I will also use this tactic so marriage negotiations will not be able to be proposed to me by making everyone tremble in fear from a fake double suicide. Therefore, you will play Romero-”

“I refuse.”

“Oh?”

Anissina was taken aback a bit after being faced with a rare resolute attitude from her childhood friend. She had not anticipated that he would reject her idea so there was a short interval before she spoke again.

Since it was incredible that she was struck speechless, Gwendal continued speaking in a

strong tone. Perhaps because of the nervousness of expressing his determination, the black tea in his cup is swaying slightly.

“Thinking about the bad behavior... no, if it's a marriage that you don't agree with I absolutely want to help you cancel that engagement. Poison is... well, if it's me I may have a bit of immunity from going along with various experiments. Naturally, this Rodero-”

“Romero.”

“Yes, I'm probably suited for playing Romero. However, you're forgetting just one thing. Let's assume that you and I, like Rolero and-”

“Romero.”

“Yeah, you and I double-suicide like that guy and Argent. Even if it's a placebo and we don't die, Densham may calmly accept that it is intolerable to subject you to such things. However, Anissina, however, what do we do if people think we have that sort of relationship? A modern Rokuro and-”

“Like I said, Romero.”

“Yeah, what are we going to do if a fuss is made about a modern Romero and Argent and rumors spread? Furthermore, if that reaches my mother's ears and she jumps to the conclusion that ‘those two were that close!’ with her brand of ‘love is the greatest virtue’ and we end up being forced to marry each other due to the king's command...”

Imagining their lives ten years from now, the both of them pale at the same time.

“Can you refuse that? A king's command... It won't be as simple as Rorifu...” (2)

“Ro-Romero.”

The temperature in the room suddenly fell.

(1) Linguistic note! The phrase here for ‘familiar’ (katte shittaru) means being familiar in a way that there is no feeling of restraint.

(2) Rorifu is written here so it reads as ‘lolita husband’--> Rori (Loli/Lolita) and Fu (夫, the kanji for husband)

Part 2

The soldier stood stock still, even while the wind tickled the top of his head.

“Hey Dacascos, the back of your head is starting to get bad, you know.”

“... Leave me alone.”

His gaze was fixed on the medical care notice board for the soldiers stationed inside Karbelnikoff Castle. On the general use notice board next to it, various things were posted ranging from promotion and transfer announcements to entertainment events. However, there was no other important use for this medical care notice board besides posting the date and time for the annual health checkup. Actually, until just yesterday there was a four-year-old, faded advertisement for dental cleaning posted here. However now...

“Oh, there’s a new notice.”

“That’s right. And with this complex and bizarre signature it seems that it’s from Lady Anissina.”

“Eeek, The Red Devil!”

Lady Anissina von Karbelnikoff was a talented and honored unmarried woman who would experiment on people standing around, scold those people sitting around, and all that was before her was a painting of Hell, but there was one thing that even that woman overflowing with strength and beauty had trouble with. Her penmanship was unique and it was impossible for the ordinary person to decipher it.

“It’s the same manly handwriting as usual, or rather bad handwriting.”

“... What do you think it is? ‘Seeking someone to play skull,’” asked Dacascos, a soldier on the verge of reaching middle-age, as he kept his gaze fixed on where the reward amount was written. Getting 2,002 gold for just one night’s hard work was shockingly profitable. If you charged into a dangerous cave and defeated a ferocious beast, the most that would drop would be 1,192 gold at best. You cannot create a good country with that. (1)

Even if there is a catch, the huge reward is appealing.

“But this is Lady Anissina, you know? There’s even talk that someone who volunteered for a new medicine trial got his head turned into a donkey’s and was sent home. If it’s not to the point where you need to sell your body to pay back loans, it’s best to not get involved.”

“Ah, yeah.”

Even after his coworker coming off the night shift left, Dacascos kept gazing at the finer points of the notice. While he was on duty, the only thing in his head was 2,002 gold and he even spoke in an absentminded tone when he called out that he was taking over. After work his single friends invited him out, but he headed straight for home as per usual. His *sick* and elderly mother was eagerly awaiting the return of her son.

Along the way, he was thinking of the reward. The four digit number dances in his brain. Because he was walking so carelessly, he did not notice the men who appeared. It startled him when his arms were grabbed.

“Hey Dacascos, have you gotten the money?”

“Uhyaa!”

Two men wearing tasteless snakeskin shoes push Dacascos up against a wall. A man in the distance whose body shape resembled a square tossed his cigarette away and gave a disturbing laugh.

"The deadline is the day after tomorrow. Do you understand what *deadline* means, ya know?"

"Ya know'? I can't get such a large amount in such a hurry... And I said that it was because of gambling, didn't I? My daughter's birthday present-

"Dumbass, don't act all high and mighty after we lent you money. Show us some sincerity, ya know. If that's the case then get some money by selling your scalp."

"M-my scalp?"

The bill collector with snakeskin shoes brought his face closer and grabbed Dacascos's short hair.

"That's right. Recently I heard that a weirdo scalp collector will pay for even a balding scalp like this one, ya know?"

"I... I can't sell my scalp."

"Don't say that. You need money for your sick mother don't you?"

"B-but if I do that I won't even be able to go to work."

He ran away in a panic and slowly opened the door to his house. There was not even a light on in the kitchen. Thinking that his mother was probably in her bedroom, he walks in that direction as he takes off his coat.

"Mom?"

"Oh Dacky, you're back."

She was opening a flat box on the table with an arm that looked like a withered branch. If you looked closely in the yellow light from the lamp, there were around a hundred cigarette butts in it. Lined up in a row, each one had a nametag.

"How was your day, Dacky? Did you get your hands on any of Lord Densham or Lady Anissina's garbage?"

Dacascos let out a sad sigh.

"Mom, that's your illness..."

At that moment, he made up his mind. If he sold his scalp, what would happen to his mother, left behind? And if she found out that her son would never again bring home any of the noble's trash, she just might throw herself in front of a carriage in grief.

He had to pay back his debt somehow.

Moreover... When he remembered his daughter's tears when they separated, his nose and eyes ached. If he sent over enough child support money, his wife would think better of him. He does not think that he will be able to return to that happy life he had before, but he at least wants to do something for his estranged wife and child.

If it is for them, he will play the skull or whatever other role.

a. First Part! The word for skull in Japanese is 'dokuro.' Since Anissina's handwriting is so atrocious, what it likely says is 'Romero.'

b. Second part! The joke with the gold. This is actually two jokes in one. The first I think a lot of people would understand because it's a video game joke about money dropping from killing monsters. The second is a joke with the number 1192 and a popular Japanese mnemonic in history class for remembering the year 1192 as the start of the Kamakura Shogunate ('ii kuni tsukurou' or Let's make a good country). So, in Japanese if you say 1192 as individual numbers it goes 'ichi-ichi-kyuu-ni.' Taking the first letter of 'ichi' and then turning 9 into its short form of 'ku', you get 'iikuni' and bam, we have a mnemonic. Japan actually has TONS of these kinds of mnemonics floating around in everyday life so if you're studying the language it's worth taking a look at. Here's a wiki page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_wordplay.

* * * * *

It is not an exaggeration to say that work efficiency is determined by the excellence of the assistant.

In that respect, Lord von Voltaire was blessed. Two years ago, he had snatched a private female secretary who had aced the official certification test in one shot away from a corrupt trader. She had an appearance quite unlike the usual career woman with ocher hair turning grey and – to say it politely – a body weight three times the norm, but she started her work with a lively voice unimaginable from her physique.

It was lucky he did not choose his private secretary based on age or looks. Even if her hips were a little, no, very full, he much preferred someone who was intellectual and good at manual labor.

"Good morning, Your Excellency."

"Mm."

"There is a slight change in your schedule for today. First with the matter of the facility on the border, because there was a delay in the maintenance in the flood plain due to the recent rainfall, the facility administrator is unable to accompany you. If you want, I can move that to another day."

"Do that."

"Here is today's daily report on The Great Demon Kingdom. If you don't mind?"

"Of course." As he took the daily paper larger than his face, Gwendal nonchalantly asked his secretary a question. "How is your child, Amblin?"

"She's doing well, thanks to you. The daycare in this castle is perfect, after all. It's a marked difference from my last job. As you would expect since Lady Anissina, defender of women, took control of it. This is really the best environment for working mothers such as myself. Ah, I forgot to mention, but speaking of Lady Anissina..."

Amblin fished out a sealed envelope from the pending documents tray and carefully placed it on her boss's desk. Because it was an official letter addressed to the master of Voltaire Castle, His Excellency Gwendal, she had quickly scanned it beforehand.

"It's an invitation to a banquet by Lord von Karbelnikoff. Something about Lady Anissina getting engaged."

"What!?"

"I was surprised too with the abrupt news. The banquet is planned for five days from now... will you attend? Ah, it's written in large print there. The daily report wouldn't be able to not say anything, or rather not celebrate, if it's someone like Lady Anissina."

On the page where the results of hunting and throwing matches were normally written there was a huge picture of a woman with flaming red hair.

As if that were not enough, there was a large headline with thick letters.

'Will The Red Devil Finally Face Her Consequences!?'

The ostentatiously written subheadings read: 'Tragically, the Poor Birdie Rochefort Falls Victim to the Witch' 'Is this a Political Marriage Disregarding Men's Rights?' 'The Nightmarish Days Awaiting the Husband'

No matter how you read it, this news article is not painting a normal picture of this engagement.

"This is quite the exposé. It's hard to believe that an insider would divulge such detailed information."

Everything from the schedule until the engagement to the date of the ceremony is detailed in the article. According to the *Daily Demon* (The Great Demon Kingdom's Daily Report), today is the luncheon for both families. In the afternoon, Miss Anissina will reveal her wedding dress and conduct a window proposal. Written by Reginald Ponchack, Karbelnikoff Branch Office. (1)

Gwendal's heart rate suddenly sped up.

No way.

"That reminds me, an introduction to the career of her partner, Lord Jean Luc von Rochefort, was written in the *Monthly Demon*. It was an interview of him being the kingdom's leading ornithologist, but he seemed to be a timid... ah, here it is. Do you want to see?"

In the monthly magazine spread out before him, there was a smiling man who was certainly a noble but who had a bird-like face and did not seem to be an important person by any standard. Gwendal immediately saw that this man was Densham's type.

A sense of unease rapidly spread throughout him and his mind was full of bad premonitions. He was not worried for the man. If he had decided to marry Anissina, he had guts. Even so, he also was not shamefully irritated about his childhood friend's engagement. If she had a new guinea pig nearby, Gwendal's daily hardships would likely end.

But then what was this throbbing in his chest?

After imagining a frighteningly sinister conclusion, he wanted to hold his head in his hands.

"No, there's no way."

Even if it was the indomitable Mad Magicalist, she would never do something so terrible. Gwendal was uneasy about the heinous scheme from a few days ago being carried out.

There are numerous other ways to turn down a marriage proposal and, most importantly, since he had refused there was no one to play the necessary role of Romero. So that means that the plan failed and no one had come to any harm.

"Your Excellency?"

"Ah, yes what?"

"Your pen is upside down."

He suddenly realized that his right hand was stained blue. This was bad. His unease had gotten so intense he was starting to be unable to think about other things.

"Shall I bring you another pen?"

Did you say 'another'? Another... another... another man!? That's right. Even if one of her friends had turned her down, Anissina would not simply give up. There was a possibility that she had decided on a second Romero and was now secretly carrying out her plan.

"It's nothing I should be worried abo-... wait... Amblin!"

"Yes?"

The first-class secretary raised her head with a smile.

"When was the last time we heard anything from Conrart and Wolfram?"

"His Excellency Wolfram has been with Her Majesty Cecilie at the royal castle for the last two weeks. I heard that from a messenger yesterday. I remember that His Excellency Conrart left the Gyllenhaal territory... three months ago... I apologize. I don't know where he is at the moment."

"I see."

Although he answered calmly, the toe of his shoe is grinding against the floor.

The source of his unease and irritation was that annoying 'Operation Romero and Argent.'

If Anissina carried it out, she would need a sacrificial Romero. If her nearby target of Gwendal refused, there was a possibility that her eyes would turn to his younger brothers. Because of his age and appearance it would be unnatural for his youngest brother Wolfram to take part in a double suicide, but his other brother who was just a few years younger than himself, Lord Conrart Weller, was suitable for anything.

Women of all ages loved him, but because of his father's human blood there was a part of the nobility who alienated him. Before his military achievement in the last war, he had only been afforded a rank lower than that of the ten noble families. That would also be a reason that people would object to him becoming a husband to someone from the prestigious Karbelnikoff family.

"Amblin."

"Yes?"

"Have you heard of the drama called 'Romero and Argent?'"

"Of course. It's the tragic love tale of a couple unable to be together because of their families and social status."

That's even worse! Conrart had actually experienced that. It was unclear as to whether it had reached the point of love, but considering his past, it was not unthinkable that he would be moved by Anissina's lies.

"Amblin!"

"Yes!"

"Who drinks the poison first!?"

"Poison? The drug? Romero drinks it first. Uh, Your Excellency? Where are you going, Your Excellency!?"

Even though he hoped it would end with his needless fear, Gwendal could not simply sit by and do nothing and had begun to walk away.

He would never make it on time with a horse. But even so, it was difficult for someone skilled

in earth magic to manipulate the magic-powered kite that flew through the air.

He has no choice but to use *that*.

Throwing the door open to his living room, Lord von Voltaire roughly pulled open his writing desk's drawer. The ancient wooden drawer opened smoothly without a sound.

"Ah, it smells like the balcony."

"Although apparently you can't take your time."

It is his favorite desk that he has used for decades. He knows how much the drawer will hold. No matter how you look at it, it is not wide enough for a large man to fit. On top of that, Gwendal was extremely tall and would probably get stuck before he even got in up to his knees.

In any case, he tries putting his right foot in. It is deeper than he thought it was.

With an astonished face like she was watching something absurd, Amblin speaks while she worries about how she could help after glancing between her boss and the desk.

"Um, Your Excellency, what are you doing?"

"I'm trying... to go... to Karbelnikoff Castle... by using... a dimensional travel route! Damn it! I'm somehow getting through to the inside, but I can't do anything about the small and narrow size!"

"Why did you make an entrance in a place like that?"

"How should I know!?"

The secretary falls silent for a while and watches over the castle lord scuffling with the hole. Eventually, the tall Gwendal ends up with only the upper half of his body hanging out of the drawer utterly exhausted.

"Your Excellency?"

"... Yeah."

"Why don't you try going in head first? Or, perhaps I should have a go at it?"

"What?"

"Despite appearances, I have a bit of confidence in my figure. If things go well, the route will widen and a tall person might somehow be able to get through."

It was really lucky that he did not choose his secretary based upon age and looks!

(1) So I wanted to call attention to the newspaper name. I'm not sure if I mentioned this before, but I'm using the official English translation of Shin Makoku (The Great Demon Kingdom) even though it actually means The True Demon Kingdom. The 'shin' in Shin Makoku (真) is an archaic form of this character for truth (真) which is the same 'shin' in Shinou (真王) which is why I call him The True King. ANYWAY, the actual name of the newspaper is 'Shin Nichi' which would translate to something along the lines of the *Daily Truth*, but since I use The Great Demon Kingdom that wouldn't make sense and the *Daily Great* is just weird sounding so I just said the *Daily Demon* since that was the word from The Great Demon Kingdom that fit best into a newspaper title. Besides, the *Daily Truth* sounds like a religious flyer of some sort and I think we can all agree that wouldn't mesh well with the whole demon thing XD

* * * * *

Dacascos still could not believe he was here.

He never thought that he would enter a noble woman's private room. Nevertheless, what was before his eyes was the personal life of a dazzling single woman.

"Huh... so Lady Anissina was living in a room like this... Ah, no no!"

He was about search around for a souvenir for his mother out of habit. This is not the place for that. The inside of the room, completely red and light-blue, had a different smell than a group of soldiers. It was like perfume or flowers. Glancing at the window, he saw that three flies were lying there dead.

"... Insecticide..?"

There are multicolored paintings hanging on the walls, but if you look closely they are filled in with mysterious mathematical formulas. On top of the clumsily made table, there are glass containers of various sizes lined up. There are fingers and eyeballs and bone fragments floating in the green liquid.

"Oh, so Lady Anissina was a collector as well."

There is an anatomical model with exposed muscles dressed in a pale dressing gown.

The sound of footsteps from a narrow gait approaches and the door suddenly opens. Anissina, who seemed to have come at a run, steps in with flushed cheeks. She had an extravagant dress that accentuated her breasts carelessly hiked up all the way to her thighs. She firmly locks the door in three places.

"That should do it."

"L-Lady Anissina."

He speaks in a frightened voice as if he is a young girl that just got caught up in a sordid affair.

"I thought I told you to hide your face!" She shoves the dressing gown from before over Dacascos's head. "Alright, there is not much time. If we carry on carelessly that bird-face will come to the window. I will only explain this once so listen well."

The traditional window proposal ceremony is an annoying ritual when the person proposing marriage stands outside his partner's window and sings in a loud voice and shouts and then finally throws a large rock and destroys the window in a savage, manly way. Nowadays because sometimes the suitor is a woman or the repair fees are non-trivial, it has been reduced to singing a song in the garden and tapping on the window with a small pebble.

If there is no answer it is seen as an unspoken agreement and the suitor enters through the window.

"Although it would be nice if that bird-face does not throw an unnecessarily large rock because he is holding a grudge for making him cry in front of his parents."

Before he could even exclaim 'You made him cry!?' Anissina held out a paper and pen. Sure enough, the handwriting was so horrendous that Dacascos could not read it.

“Go on, sign here. This document says that even if this plan ends in failure I will not be held accountable. Be at ease, I have not included a drop of deadly poison that might cause you to lose your life.”

“L-lose my life? What are you making me do?”

“You only have to drink this drug and, for a little while, perform a double suicide.”

There was a small bottle filled to the brim with purple liquid in the Mad Magicalist’s hand. The afternoon sunlight hit it diagonally and, although it might be his imagination, it sparkled ominously.

“Double suicide?”

“Are you going to be astonished about every little thing? This is why men nowadays are said to be more pathetic than otters. If you and I go so far as to double suicide then Densham will never negotiate another marriage proposal again. We might be treated as lovers for a year or so, but after that you can take your reward and disappear somewhere. Go on, sign your name here. And then here, if for some reason you cannot receive the 2,002 gold, write down the name of the person you will give it to on this line. If I am not mistaken, you have a mother. It is fine if it is a parent’s name.”

After slipping the expensive pen into his hand, she pulls his hand towards the paper with a strength one would not expect from such thin arms. Dacascos was about to start crying and kept repeating ‘please wait’ in rapid succession.

“Please wait, what do you mean ‘cannot receive?’ Is there a possibility I’m going to get killed here!?”

“These days you can die from a potted plant falling on your head as you walk down the street. This is only detailing the worst case scenario. According to the plan you will not die.”

“According to the plan!?”

Either because she was born impatient or because she was pressured by being faced with a counterattack from bird-face, The Red Devil opens the lid to the small bottle and splashed a drop of it on to the carpet.

Smoke rises along with an explosive sound.

“Eeeek!”

“Everything is just as planned.”

Even so, thinking that he could pay back his entire debt and his family could live off of the leftover money, Dacascos forces his fingers to stop trembling and writes down his mother’s and daughter’s names.

“Did you write it? You wrote it, right!? Now, drink this up in one gulp. It is alright, according to the drama, Argent comes following soon after.”

“Eh, then Lady Anissina, you’ll drink the drug too?”

“Certainly not! I will just pretend to. In this scenario, someone who noticed something was amiss comes and stops me just as I am about to drink it.”

“Eh!? Then I’m the only one getting sacrificed!? I don’t like that! That’s unfair!”

“Be quiet. Even if it is a fake double suicide, it will be suspicious if neither of us drinks any poison. Besides, even if your outward appearance changes a bit you can still continue your work as a soldier, but I need my delicate fingers for my research and experiments. I will not be able to ascertain subtleties with rotted fingers.”

Anissina grabbed Dacascos’s chin with those supposedly delicate fingers. Without even

needing to pinch his nose to suffocate him, she forcefully wrenches open his mouth.

"This is it. Resign yourself and play your part in my drama!"

Dacascos saw a real devil.

"Ah, 'ait, 'ait 'ease! I for'ot to write ano'er name! Anflin, lemme write 'at down, Anflin!"

"Anissina wait!"

A tall man kicked down the door to her clothing shelves and rushed into the room. There was cold sweat on his pale brow.

"What is it Gwendal? I am busy at the mom-"

"Stop! Don't make Conrart drink that poison!"

"Conrart?"

While Anissina was distracted for a moment after hearing an unexpected name, he snatches the bottle with the purple liquid away from her. A little splashes on his right arm from the movement and a burning pain runs all the way up to his elbow.

"... tch, you were planning on making my younger brother drink something like this!?"

"Younger brother? You mean Lord Weller? Where is he?"

"What? Then..." Gwendal rips Anissina's dressing gown off of the head of the freed man squatting down on the floor and coughing with hand on his throat. "... His hair is thinning out."

"You think that I would use Lord Weller? He was an important person to Suzanna Julia. Did you really think that I would have him play Romero!? How belittling. To think that this is how a childhood friend would treat me, it is so pathetic I could cry!"

"No, s-sorry."

Even if her prey was not Conrart she was still committing a heinous deed. Completely forgetting that, Gwendal wipes the sweat from his brow. There is something red dangling on the edges of his vision. Was there blood or something flowing from where he hit his temple in the dark?

"Since you appeared from the clothes rack... you used it."

"It was an emergency so I used that dimensional pathway or whatever to-"

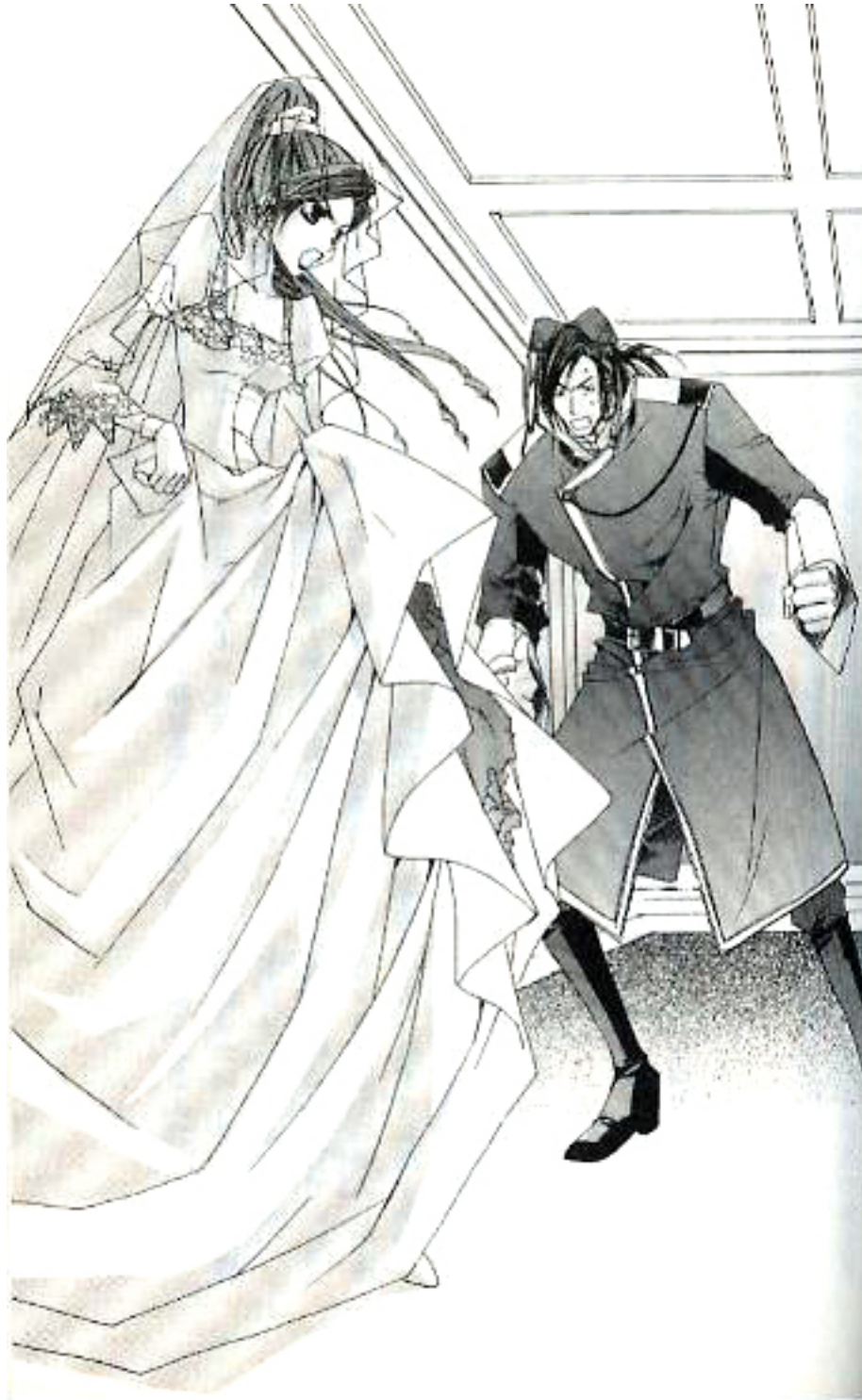
"You used it, my underwear drawer!"

"Ah, yeah, I remember passing something like that."

"It seems so! You have ears on your head!"

Without him realizing it, her underwear had found its way on top of his head.

He is actually very embarrassed.



“Dacky!?”

“A-Anflin.”

The secretary from Voltaire Castle came wading through the sea of clothes and screamed as soon as she stuck her head out from the shelves.

"Kya! Dacky, did you finally do it!? Did you finally sneak into Lady Anissina's room to steal cigarette butts and stuff!?"

"No, no that's not it, Blin! There's a good reason for all of this, *cough*"

"Ah, then you must be *Anflin*. This man forgot to write your name in the reward recipient's area."

"What!?"

Amblin's normally small eyes narrowed even more in anger.

"Is that true, Dacky?"

"No, no that's not it, Blin! There's a good reason for all of that too, *cough*"

Along with the sound of breaking glass, the suitor, Lord Jean Luc von Rochefort Bird-Face, jumps into the room with his short legs.

The woman called The Red Devil watched the legs of the man arranged to become her fiancé with a rare, weak gaze.

"... According to the plan, Dacascos would have begun to stiffen on the floor and the person in question would come through the window and stop me just as I was bringing the bottle to my mouth... And then Densham, who would have suffered a shock, would have tearfully vowed to never bring up negotiations for a political marriage again if I was so opposed to it... But no matter how you look at it, there is no time for that now." Anissina bit her tongue and slightly hung her head as her words trembled. "... The plan, is a failure."

Next to her, Dacascos is getting hit by his ex-wife after shoving the document at her.

Drenched in sweat, Jean Luc pulls his bottom through the window and points at everyone and shouts with a wild bird voice.

Gwendal lays a hand on Anissina's shoulder.

"Anissina." A part of his brain is dimly thinking that she is wearing unusually luxurious clothes. "Anissina, you should just clearly reject him with your usual way of talking. You should just flatly refuse the next time Densham brings up new negotiations. If it's a troublesome man that you can't deal with, I'll always be there to help you."

"I cannot always rely on you, Gwen."

"I'm the one most familiar with you, am I not?"

This same sort of thing has been repeating over and over again since forever.

It has been this way since they were children so he is not about to hand her over to someone else after all of this time.

"Huh!?" Climbing in through the window after the suitor, Densham turns around in a circle as he looks around the room. There is a rooster on his right shoulder. "Why is Lord von Voltaire here?"

He is desperately forcing open his swollen eyes and trying to figure out what was happening.

After laying eyes on the small bottle Gwendal had in his hand, he finally seemed to grasp the situation.

"Ah! Don't drink that!"

He charges in to grab it, but the marked difference in height prevents him from doing so and he cannot reach even if he stretches.

"That ominously shining purple, is that the drug from Romero and Argent!? Why is something like that in this room? And why was Lord von Voltaire about to drink it?"

"I wasn-"

"Ah, are the two of you..."

Gwendal frantically shook his head and kept repeating 'wait' an innumerable amount of times. However, not listening to what others say also seems to be a genetic trait of Karbelnikoffs.

"You were against Anissina's engagement so the two of you were going to drink that like Romero and Argent weren't you!? Oh my little sister, if that was the case then you should have said so. If that's how it is then I won't bother you with marriage proposals."

"Th-that's not what-"

With Minchey still on his shoulder, Densham wraps his arms around his sister and her childhood friend.

"Your big brother didn't know that he was troubling you so much that you would try to have a life together after death. I'm sorry for not realizing sooner, but I promise that I absolutely won't ever get between you two."

The two of them were both screaming that he was misunderstanding, but the excited rooster also started screeching so no one could understand what anyone was saying.

"Uhuh, Minchey quiet down. I see... so you had that sort of relationship with him. Gwendal, as another older brother I'll make a formal request. Even though my little sister is rude, she's brimming with talent so please get along happily with her for the rest of your life."

Vanquished by the words 'get along happily,' Gwendal felt faint for a moment. What brought him back to his senses was an intense pain in his right arm.

"... What... is this pain?"

With a face that said 'that reminds me,' the manufacturer of Romero's poison said plainly, "Your right arm has begun to rot. The liquid splashed on it just now, did it not?"

"What!? Isn't this poison that will kill you if you drink it? Two destined lovers who can't be together in this world drink this poison in a double suicide to be at least be together in the next-"

"When did I say that?"

"What!?"

Dressed in a beautiful wedding dress, Anissina places her hands on her corset and lifts her chin.

"In order to be together after death, Romero and Argent drink a drug that will turn them into Earth Skeletons. However, sure enough the drug is a fake. When demons die they do not become another species and they had to live forever as rotted dead bodies, or rather living corpses. It is a suitable drama to be considered one of the three great tragedies. This is why I told you to at least read the classics. You cannot hide your lack of education behind the wrinkles between your eyebrows."

H-how cruel.

Next to the sweating Gwendal, Densham was innocently enjoying himself as he grabbed the bottle.

"Wow, so this really is Romero's drug, huh? If you can actually make something like this, my sister, you truly are a genius!"

"Even I am not evil so I made it so the effects would wear off after half a year, if it works as planned. In other words, I calculated it so that if you bear with it for a while the decomposed flesh will steadily metabolize into its original state and after the same duration that it takes the

body to replace its blood, you would resurrect as a healthy demon.”

“... I, I was about to be forced to drink a horrible drug like that?”

Even if he would be rewarded with a large sum of money, he had to decline decomposing alive. While being strangled by his ex-wife, Dacascos vowed in his heart to never again get involved in gambling.

At his wit's end, Gwendal just stared at his blackening arm. Only a little of the liquid had splashed on me so why does this have to happen to me..? Ah, it's rotting... my valuable sword arm. It's decomposing before my eyes.

“Why are you sitting down like an old man? It is a drug that I made so of course I know the cure. Your right arm is merely rotting. You are not some unfortunate little puppy so stop looking at me with those sad eyes.”

Like his right-arm was a franken-dog. (1)

After that, Lord Densham von Karbelnikoff never again negotiated a marriage proposal for his younger sister Anissina.

Learning his lesson from that incident, Dacascos abstained from gambling and even though he ended up repaying his debt using his ex-wife's salary, he was not able to face Amblin again until they reconciled and bought a house in the capital.

It took two months for blood to start flowing in Gwendal's arm again, and during that time he took every opportunity to keep on muttering complaints to himself.

And thus, Lord Gwendal von Voltaire decided that he would stay with his childhood friend and knitting tutor, the woman feared as one of The Great Demon Kingdom's Three Great Witches, Lady Anissina von Karbelnikoff, for as long as he lived, tosa.

“Your Excellency, a picture postcard came from His Excellency Conrart from where he was staying. Shall I read it? He won Mehilsar's World's Best Dancing Tournament... Well, it seems he's just as skilled a dancer as ever.” (2)

“... Why did this happen why did this happen why did this happen...”

(1) The franken-dog thing is a pun using kanji. The word for decomposition used here is ‘furan’ and the kanji for dog ‘ken’ was tacked on the end to make ‘furanken’ (腐乱犬) which is how franken is pronounced in Japanese. That coupled with the meaning of the kanji makes it mean franken-dog, pretty much ^-^ Extra linguistic note on Japanese, the kanji for dog (犬) is pronounced ‘inu’ when on its own and referring to dogs in general and it is pronounced ‘ken’ when it is referring to specific type or breed of dog and thus part of a word. On that note, the name of the popular Japanese dog breed Shiba Inu (柴犬) should actually be pronounced Shiba Ken but apparently one of us foreigners misread the kanji and that wrong reading stuck~ The same thing goes for all the other Japanese dog breeds with ‘inu’ tacked on the end of their English names ^-^; All of these footnotes are ridiculously long, aren't they?

(2) There is also a sort-of pun here. Pronunciation-wise there is only one character difference between World's Best Dancing Tournament and World's Best Fighting Tournament (Tenkaichi Butoukai vs. Tenkaichi Budoukai). I say 'sort-of' because there's nothing inherently strange about saying World's Best Dancing Tournament like this, but I can't help but think this is supposed to be a joke because of the Dragon Ball series popularizing the phrase 'Tenkaichi Budoukai' and then having the war hero Conrad win the 'Tenkaichi Butoukai.'

* . * . * . *

The both of them fell silent for a while as they tried to control the goosebumps on their arms. After sipping the long-cold tea, Badwik finally opened his mouth.

"That was an amazing story you just told me."

"It is amazing, is it not?"

In a sense.

"It was definitely stimulating, passionate and life-threatening. It was a tragedy unlike any other for His Excellency Gwendal. Just-imagining-what-happened-to-everyone-afterwards-my-heart-speeds-up-however!"

It happened when Günter opened the door to request more drinks.

"Greetings, Your Excellency!"

A middle-aged soldier with his hair and eyebrows cleanly shaved off came running up with a long sword that seemed to be getting in his way.

"You are being noisy, Dacascos."

"Ah, I-I apologize. However, The Flying Skeleton Tribe, well, um..."

The editor widened his ever-working eyes and took a hard look at the bald-headed man.

If he's Dacky, then... did he end up selling his scalp?

In actuality, he had gotten used to the hairstyle at the monastery and had simply kept it as so after he left.

"Thank you for your patience. It seems that the flying skeleton messenger that Anissina sent has brought an undecipherable list," Günter said.

"Oh, but Lady Anissina truly is wise!

For-her-to-act-out-one-of-The-Great-Demon-Kingdom's-three-great-tragedies-in-order-to-end-her-engagement-negotiations-she-truly-does-see-the-world-differently-however!" Badwik opened his arms wide as if he was standing on stage, frowned and made a face as if he were about to cry. "'O Romero, Romero! Wherefore art thou Romero? Ah, even if this body rots away and I become an Earth Skeleton, I will continue to love you, love you, love you forever!'

Even-I-cried-at-that-part-however.

When-they-hugged-each-other-fiercely-all-of-the-flesh-on-their-arms-fell-off-in-a-lump. Well, things would have turned out better if Argent had known that normal demons can't turn into one of the Flying Skeleton Tribe or the Earth Skeleton Tribe no matter how hard they try."

"However I just cannot understand the willingness to try to be together even if that means becoming a rotted body or a living corpse. In modern times this is a strange way of thinking, but I suppose it is commonly accepted if it is in an old book."

"That's-right-I-agree-with-you-completely-however. However, Your Excellency Günter, however! This story is definitely an anecdote about His Excellency Gwendal's personal tragedy, but I don't really get a deep, passionate feeling from it. Rather than reading as an ardent love story, it is more of a horror story that you absolutely must hear the end of and the plot is really more for a different literary branch."

"Horror." Remembering Gwendal being stricken with a disease that rotted his arm, Günter's body suddenly started shaking. "Horror... that is true."

"So now, do you have a story about a good sort of guy who would leave the ladies spellbound but also somehow being so touched that they are moved to tears? For example, an anecdote about His Excellency Lord Conrart Weller, the man in the top spot on the public ranking of His Majesty's partiality."

Badwik had probably not seen that Günter's ranking had taken a nosedive in the newest edition.

The tutor pushed down his unhappiness and kept his composure while opening the red cover of an old diary.

"Spellbound, moved to tears, Conrart?"

The editor gives a good mannered smile with a face that did not reveal his true feelings.

All right then. If that is the case then he will find a 'good story' about Lord Weller. However even Günter could be stubborn.

As if he would ever tell a story about His Majesty and Conrart getting along together!

"Conrart is near offensively popular with women, after all. I am sure that there are far more stories about his love affairs with others as opposed to with His Majesty... oh?"

Several scraps of paper fluttered out from the middle of Günter's old diary. They were thin and yellowed and the edges were frayed. They were at least ten years old. A short composition was scribbled onto them with slanted letters of various sizes.

"Why is there writing I knew nothing about in my diary... This looks a bit like Conrart's handwriting... What is this... 'The Demon King is an actor'... What!? His Majesty is an actor!?"

"Hold-on-a-moment-please-look-at-this-number-that-looks-like-a-date-however! The four numbers at the top are probably a year... nineteen hundred... What calendar is that? It is a huge difference from our ancient demon calendar and it does not match up with the standard or Shimaron calendars. Even if this is His Excellency Lord Conrart Weller's scrawl, I don't think this is about something that happened in this country however."

As he examined the faded bits of paper, Günter came to a conclusion.

A calendar no one had heard of and Lord Weller's hasty scribbling. About 16 or 17 years ago, he had left this world.

"... Perhaps this might be... a record of what he did in another world."

"Did you say another world?"

So surprised he literally jumped out of his chair, the petite editor's mouth fell open. No one would easily believe there was a world other than the one that they lived in. Simply imagining the existence of another dimension was difficult let alone accepting that fact.

However, Badwik's eyes were sparkling with anticipation from his own curiosity and his business sense cultivated over many years.

"This is a valuable record of when Lord Weller was in another world?"

I-don't-believe-it-I-have-never-seen-such-a-thing-not-only-myself-but-not-a-single-person-at-my-company-can-even-imagine-what-another-world-is-like!

How-is-it-is-it-awesome-what-is-that-I-would-love-to-read-that-however!"

"Even though you are so excited these are all small fragments of events, so if you want to understand the full story it would be best to ask Conrart himself. However if you really want to challenge yourself, I would not mind if you attempted to put all of these fragments in order."

"Put them in order? Let's try let's try!"

And so, Günter and Badwik immersed themselves in lining up what appeared to be the scribbles of the absent Lord Conrart Weller. This work would further their understanding of the other world, help them understand their own origins, and as for whether it would be the start of the relations between The Great Demon Kingdom and Earth, well, that depended on the conclusion that these two came to.

"Ugh, when it comes to Conrart he is kind to women even outside the kingdom."

"Yes, I can see why he is so popular however."

What they were focusing on was wrong from the very beginning.

All's Well That Ends Well

I, Günter von Christ, am the royal advisor to His Majesty The 27th Demon King and I also serve as His Majesty Yuuri's tutor. Therefore, I am aware that Conrart brought His Majesty's soul to another world.

However! I had no idea that something like this had happened!

This is shocking this is shocking this is shocking! Ah what do I do what do I do should I do that!? What is 'that'?

Ah, saying I know nothing is inexcusable...

*Could I have endowed
With the pine tree's thousand years
One I used to see,
Parted from her nevermore
All my sorrows would be o'er.(1)*

おはようございます
おはようございます



Part 1

*I might run away. I might betray your expectations and hopes and just disappear.
Knowing that, are you still going to give me this duty? There are others more skilled and
those far more loyal than I.
Why do I have to go? You know it will hurt me.*

The right side of my body is oddly hot.

His ear and cheek pressed against the ground especially feel as if they are burning. His veins are pounding so hard they feel like they are going to rupture and he notices a pain in the back of his head. He is spread out on top of a hot rock like a corpse. When he experimentally tries to move his stiffened fingers, he realizes he is not holding anything.

Ah, I dropped my sword along the way.

Like I care.

With a throaty laugh on his lips, he slowly forces his eyes open. There are dried tears on his eyelashes as if he was sleeping for a long time.

I don't have a weapon. Like I care about that. Hopefully the first person to come across me is a thief after my wallet. If he cuts me down and I lose my life, I won't be troubled in the slightest. It was lucky I dropped my sword.

I look just like an idiotic tourist.

Wondering if he had any money on him anyway, he reaches up with his right hand to feel his breast pocket. There were no coins or bills there, but a cool and icy bottle.

This painful, troublesome and important object was undamaged. When he touched it gingerly with his fingertips, there were no chips or breaks anywhere. He gives a sigh laced with mixed feelings and pushes himself up with both elbows.

What came into his blurry vision was dry air and a cloud of dust colored in the evening sun. A gray road cut across the yellow expanse. In the middle of the cracked road there was a line drawn that seems to have been white at some point and he was lying right on top of that completely unarmed. The air rises in swaying waves from the ground around his feet.

... Svelera? When he tried saying the name of a place he knows, he was assaulted with thirst. His voice won't come out normally.

A vibration like a tremor and a sound from loud marching trumpet come from far away. When he looked behind him startled, he saw a giant yellow box running.

Because he saw a human figure through the window at the front, he realizes that that man is controlling it. However, there are no horses or cows pulling it and it is charging ahead at an incredible pace. Rolling across the surface of the road in a panic, he just barely escapes to the sandy soil on the sides.

It's armor I've never seen before. It's probably the latest type of military tank. So that means this is wartime? The yellow box passes by where he was and comes to a sudden stop in the distance.

What is that!? Is it moving by magic or exorcism? Then that means that this is a land with an abundance of people skilled in either magic or exorcism.

He had thought he would be surrounded by a crowd of soldiers, but after leaving one petite figure behind, the box runs away once again. If the brown smudges he caught a fleeting glance

of were rust, that would mean the entire body was made out of iron. The wheels were gray and covered in dust and he didn't know what they were made of.

The petite figure walked in his direction and looked down upon him as he sat on the ground. The figure had a strange hat on that was only long in the front. They had brown skin close to the color of aged wood and the limbs sticking out of the short sleeves of their plain clothes were thin. Judging from their physique and innocent expression, they are likely somewhere in between *forty and sixty* years old. There is a large discrepancy in the growth of demons so he does not know their actual age.

What surprised him the most was that the eyes peering at him were both a magnificent black.

No, not just their eyes, their eyelashes and eyebrows and even the hair sticking out from under the hat were all a perfect black.

Unbelievable! He had lived amongst demons his entire life, but he had never met a Twin Black before. He had heard that those who carry the black are very seldom born even amongst pure demons. In The Great Demon Kingdom's long history, there are only one or two recorded.

Furthermore, if the words of the priestesses are to be trusted, this is not demon territory. He had received an important mission and been sent from his homeland to another world, after all.

"Who're you?"

They speak to him in a short phrase, but he doesn't understand it at all. The black-haired young boy crouches down and looks him in the eye before speaking again.

"You weren't hit by the school bus so why is half of your face covered in blood? Why are you sleeping in the middle of the road in El Salvallo in July? And why are you wearing clothes like in the Shakespeare movies we see in school? Are you a stage actor?"

Because he had the sense that the intonation at the end of the boy's sentence rose, the boy was undoubtedly asking him a question. But, he couldn't understand the details and he didn't think his response would get across. Seeing as he couldn't understand the language, it was unlikely he was in Svelera. The countries with sand dunes adjacent to The Great Demon Kingdom have the same language as the demons.

"Who are you? Where did you come from? Are you an illegal alien?"

"I'm Conrart," he said hoarsely, thinking that they might be asking his name. "You weren't asking my name? My name is Conrart. And just what is this place? What world did I end up in?"

"... You're from Scotland? How come you don't speak English?" (2)

"Ah, Conrad or Conrart, whichever you want to call me is fine."

After asking another question that sounded different than the others, the boy suddenly stood up. Conrad thought that he might have insulted the boy by not using polite speech. So the boy really was a demon of high status.

If you're angered by me then arrest me or cut me down.

However, the expression on the boy's tanned face was bewilderment, not anger.

"So you don't understand Spanish either. You really are a foreigner. Follow me, your face is covered in blood and if you sleep in a place like this you'll die."

The boy forcibly takes hold of his arm. The two of them pass a round sign and walk towards the sun. The injured party, staggering from thirst, fell forward several times.

A sound and vibration like before soon comes near. Before the metal vehicle stopped by them, the boy took off his blue hat and stood on tiptoe to cover his companion's head.

"Hey Carlos."

"Hiya."

The box this time was very small. Two adults sat next to each other and the seating area was completely filled. The rear section was a roofless storage compartment and there were misshapen tools heaped there that did not seem to be weapons, farming equipment or construction equipment.

The whiskered man gripping the vehicle's round helm stuck his head out of the window.

"You on your way home? Who's this white man with you? Don't see people like him around here."

He could feel the boy's unease as he gripped his arm tighter. He couldn't understand the conversation, but Conrad guessed that they were talking about him.

"He's a customer at our place. I was bringing him there."

"A man with a half bloody face?"

"... He's our customer."

The man drew his lips up and his chin wrinkled. Then, he pointed behind him with his thumb and pulled his head back in the window.

"... Alright, I won't ask. You can ride in the back if you want. It'll take you twenty minutes to get there on foot."

"Thanks."

While he climbed into the bed of the truck, the boy whispered to Conrad despite knowing that he wouldn't understand. He might have looked dejected from being so confused.

"The Owen brothers are alright. Their parents are waiting for their turn in New York so they won't be mean and report you to immigration or anything."

However, the reason that Conrad was confused wasn't because he was suspicious of them.

He was completely astonished.

The hair and eyes of both the boy he had first met and the crude men that had called out to them were jet black. As a resident of The Great Demon Kingdom where Twin Blacks were prized, he couldn't *not* be in shock.

(1) Once again, an excerpt from The Tosa Diary. So, the official English translation is kind of hard to understand. The literal translation is actually very close to the official English, but my explanation of the Japanese (which took me about a half an hour to do because it's written in 'ye olde Japanese' and I had to read an essay explaining this excerpt to understand it x.x) goes as such: If my lost child was as healthy as these thousand year old pine trees, I might not have had to part with her. I'd like to call attention to the multiple meanings of the Japanese for 'one I used to see' (mishi hito). So the author was talking about his daughter who had died, but the word can also mean 'former lover' which I believe is the meaning that relates to this story ^-^

(2) Scotland and Conrart sound a *bit* similar in Japanese kana. Sukottorando <-> Konraato.

* * * * *

Considering this heavy, metal vehicle was being run with magic, the men in the driver's seat were lightheartedly singing a song in a loud voice. After singing the same song twice, they arrive in a small town with several crowded together buildings.

After a brief inspection, he saw that there weren't any buildings above three stories and there weren't any buildings that could be a castle, a lord's mansion or even a fortress. Only the building at the center of town with the triangular roof had solid doors good for protection. Perhaps the wooden cross on top pointing towards the sky was this town's crest.

In a small hut with a white roof near the entrance of town, an old person was sleeping in a rocking chair on a wooden floor up a set of stairs. His hair, beard and eyebrows were all pure white. Guessing from his appearance, he is easily over *four hundred* years old.

The boy jogged down a narrow side road as if to hide from view. After going down the back road for a bit, he steps into the back entrance of a small and gloomy hut. It may have been because the air was dry, but this shaded place was much cooler than outside.

At first Conrad thought it was a stable or something, but since there was a metal vehicle there he finally realized it was a storage bunker. To think that even civilians were given battle tanks. So was the overall fragile look of the town a plan to deceive the enemy?

"Mom."

When the boy slightly opened the door leading farther inside, light came flowing through the crack. On the other side of the wall there were several chairs lined up and there was food and drink set out on tables. There weren't many customers, but this place was probably a restaurant.

A military tank behind a restaurant. That's insecure of them, or perhaps I should say wary?

"Carlos, why are you coming in from the garage..?"

"This guy was collapsed. His head is bleeding and he doesn't understand what I say. And it looks like he's never seen a school bus or a pickup truck before. He might be from a really far away country... or really banged his head. Maybe it's amnesia like on TV. Dad always used to say that right? 'Don't ever forget the kindness we received in this country. The weak have to help the weak...'"

"That's right."

The woman who seemed to be the mother patted the boy's shoulder as he rambled on and then she turned in Conrad's direction. The hair tied loosely at the nape of her neck, the thin lines of her eyebrows, and – although he couldn't be certain with the light behind her – both of her eyes were probably black. It's only been a short while, but he feels as if his values are about to change.

"Keep an eye on things."

Leaving her son to watch the store, the woman makes the injured man sit and brought an old tin from her house. When her fingers were just about to touch his cheek, Conrad reflexively

moved away and brought his sword arm up to his chest.

He tried to protect the object he was entrusted with.

“You have a gun!?”

Realizing that he had startled the woman, he slowly puts his right hand back down. There’s no way that this woman would know about his mission and she likely did not understand how important the object he was carrying was. If they were going to steal it, the son would have tried a long time ago.

“It’s okay. Until you’re healed up I won’t say anything to the sheriff or immigration so let me see your injury. The right side of your chin is completely red. It’s amazing your eyes are open.”

When she wipes away the blood on the surface, she sees that there is a diagonal slash on his right eyebrow. The wound is still wide open and new blood instantly comes oozing out.

The blood in the wound hadn’t begun to clot.

“So it hasn’t been that long...?”

He remembers when he got cut. Of course, the owner of the sword as well. Immediately after, he was sent flying out of The Great Demon Kingdom by the priestesses’ incantations.

“This will leave a scar if you don’t get stitches. If only you had a social security number I’d at least be able to take you to the doctor.”

After seeing off the customers, the boy returns with a bottle of water.

“He doesn’t understand a thing we say. I can’t even ask him his name. Hey you, I’m Carlos. My mother is Keisha.”

He taps his chest and the woman’s shoulder and repeats ‘Carlos, Keisha.’ It seems like those are their names. Conrad was about to give a light nod, but a small shadow moving about caught his attention. It didn’t stop until it collided with his knee.

The girl who had a clearer expression than her mother and older brother clung to his leg and spoke coquettishly to him. She was probably only around *thirteen* or so. He laughed so much he started coughing.

“That’s my little sister, Nikki. She’s three.”

Carlos, Keisha, Nikki. That’s all he understands.

* * * * *

The restaurant seemed to be doing well for itself and in the evening the inside of the shop, which would be packed with just fifteen people, was filled with noise.

Keisha wrapped a red plaid cloth around her waist and scurried about the shop like a mouse. When you thought she was working in the small kitchen, she was passing between the customers with plates and alcohol. Her son Carlos went around taking orders and kept an eye on his sister in between to make sure she wasn’t doing anything dangerous.

Conrad just absentmindedly watched them as he sat in between the kitchen and the garage.

In his homeland, they would have been promised a higher status than the ten noble families just by being a Twin Black.

Certainly they would be in danger as soon as they stepped out of demon lands. However,

those who lived inside the kingdom would be able to lead a life without anything resembling manual labor. Then what about how this parent and child are working? It's no different than a hostess at the town bar. Even when she's shouted at by irate customers, she deals with them without getting angry.

He's given up on counting, but there are quite a few customers with black hair as well. In the kingdom the most common hair color was blonde and then there were many men with brown hair like his own, but one out of every three people here had black hair down to their long eyelashes and moustaches and their skin was the color of well-toasted bread. (1)

"... Where is this?" he asked no one in particular and turns his gaze back to the small bottle he placed on the shelf. Figuring he was safe so close to a military tank, he took it out of his breast pocket when he changed clothes.

The clear bottle as tall as a finger was sealed with a green augite cap and carrying a bluish-white light inside. The white ball that seemed as if it would draw you in was the color of a cloud you would only be able to see in a dream.

Is this the edge of the world called Earth where the person I am supposed to hand this over to lives?

If so, where should I go from here? Who should I meet? What should I do?

There was a sound of porcelain breaking and a young child started crying. Standing before the broken pieces on the floor, Carlos was scolding his sister. He had probably been victim to a surprise attack by his sister while washing the dishes.

The mother knit her eyebrows.

"Carlos?"

"Nikki's okay. She just ran right into me so I was surprised..."

"You were distracted by the television weren't you?"

"... No."

Conrad slowly stood up and opened the medical supply tin that Keisha had a short while ago. He gently placed the bottle on top of the white, sterile cloth.

They are too busy.

He might not be thinking straight in his fatigue, but it doesn't seem like he will be able to sleep any time soon. If that's the case, he should work a bit without weakness and earn a meal.

Edging past the siblings, he stands before the slightly too-shallow wash basin. Twisting this cork makes water come out and the soap that lathers the sponge is in this bottle.

"... Are you okay, I mean, that injury?"

He just shrugs. The boy doesn't ask anything else and lifts his sister up to carry her into the house.

"I'm putting her to bed."

The kitchen was nicely secluded and only half of his back was visible to the customers. But then again, his life wasn't so important to have any regrets about someone finding fault with his appearance.

When he turns his neck to look behind him, there was a box around the size of a crib tilted at an angle. Around half of the men had their faces turned towards it and the rest were playing cards and amusing themselves with silly conversations.

He didn't know who was performing exactly what sort of magic, but there is a picture moving

inside of the box. A man with a red hat was swinging around a club even though there wasn't any prey around and then suddenly a huge cheer rung out. A young man in a different uniform runs out across the greenery. He seems to be picking up a rolling ball with a misshapen and large glove.

What sort of story is this play about? There really were some magic users blessed with leisure.

When Keisha came back to the kitchen she made a brief comment, but knowing that he wouldn't understand she silently did her own work. Food preparation was easy once she got an order so it seems like she prepared a lot of it before she opened the store. Much of it included beans, potatoes and onions and it looks like there are fewer types of meat than in his homeland.

Conrad continued scrubbing the dishes even after the boy returned and once there was nothing left to wash, he even fried some eggs in an excellent display of learning by imitation. He remembers when it was his turn to cook while camping out on the march and he tries mixing some of the crushed tomatoes with the short noodles. He had thought that either he or the child would eat it, but he regrets that he splashed some of it on his borrowed clothes.

Next to the bright green phone there is a picture of a chef.

"That's dad," Carlos said in a somewhat sad voice as he peeled an onion. "He died three years ago."

A young man yelled and kicked over a seat near the window facing the road. With a thick arm covered in golden hair, he grabs the collar of the hostess. Keisha grimaces in pain, but she does not pick up a weapon and attempt to defend herself.

"It's those guys again..."

Pushing aside the boy as he leaned forward, Conrad crossed the aisle with a long stride.

If he was laying a hand on a Twin Black that meant that he was a fool from a foreign country who was tricked by the absurd rumor that one could gain the power of immortality by making that person their own property.

"Let go."

He tried to give a warning just in case, but since his words wouldn't be understood anyway he grabbed the young man's arm and pulled him off.

Keisha held her throat and gave a rough cough and then laid a hand on the chest of her foreign guest. "It's okay, I'm okay. You go back."

"I'm not finished here! Hey, who's this guy with the bandages!? You weren't satisfied with just getting your husband killed so now you're whoring around with this kid!?"

He wasn't sure if he or the hostess was being insulted, but allowing someone to yell at a woman was distasteful. He twisted the man's arm behind his back and threw him out of the door.

With a face that said she didn't care at all for the man, Keisha pulls on Conrad's clothes and repeated in a hushed voice, "It's okay! Hurry, go back inside. Hurry and hide in the kid's room. The sheriff's deputy is right there. If he sees you, you're going to get arrested."

The sky had long gone dark and the road was illuminated by the lights in all of the houses. There were only a few other stores open besides this one and a young man coming out of what looked to be a general store and holding a paper bag was walking this way. He had an unbecoming, stubby beard on his chin and he was wearing a broad-brimmed hat even though it

was nighttime and there was even a star on his chest.

“Something happen, ma’am?”

“Good evening, Deputy. No, nothing really. A drunk customer just had a complaint.”

“Was it those guys again? Did they have any drugs on them?”

“No, I don’t know anything about that. They just didn’t like my cooking.”

Keisha was trying to keep up appearances while shoving Conrad back inside. The young men who caused all the ruckus might have been a bit shady because they disappeared in the blink of an eye. The young man with the stubble glanced at the newcomer and posed a question directly to him instead of the woman.

“Haven’t seen you before. Where are you from?”

“Um, he arrived just recently and is staying at our place. He’s not a kid from a town around here so you wouldn’t recog-”

“I’m asking *him*, ma’am. Besides, there weren’t any names I didn’t recognize on the intercity bus roster today. If he’s not a problem then that’s fine. So, what’s your name and where are you from?”

“Hector, he’s deaf...”

A light blue vehicle passing at an incredible speed suddenly backed up with an odd sound and stopped in front of the store. After slapping the open door roughly, the skinny driver came tumbling out. ‘Giving a military tank to an unskilled soldier like that was a mistake,’ Conrad unconsciously murmurs to himself.

“Hey, sorry I’m late!”

After seeing this late arrival with a know-it-all look, both Keisha and Stubble are taken aback. The only one who didn’t understand what he was saying was the concerned party of Conrad.

(1) Linguistic note! In Japanese, sometimes authors will use a word written in kanji and then write on the side or on top (depending on which direction the text is written) a different pronunciation to give the word a double meaning. That being said, the word for bread here is written with the kanji of an old military word for bread (menbou) and then the common word for bread (pan) is written next to it. Conrad has been relating a lot of things he’s seeing to military stuff and this is another one.

* * * * *

White robes, glasses, laugh lines.

His black hair that he let grow out a few inches too long was loosely tied behind him, but it didn’t seem to be working that well and there were bundles of hair hanging down over his cheeks and forehead. They seem to really be a nuisance and it’s irritating.

The abnormally skinny man in the white robes skillfully deceived Keisha and Stubble and got

Conrad into his car. The reason that he silently obeyed the man in the white robes even though he couldn't understand what he was saying either was that the man showed him a familiar bottle in the wooden box he had tucked under his arm.

The augite serving as the cap was different, but the strength and calm of the shining light inside was without a doubt a 'soul.'

That's right, a soul.

For various reasons it had come to the end of its life and was a pure soul waiting for its next life.

It was a soul that did not yet belong to anyone that had all of its sin and impurity completely erased before setting out on a new life as another existence.

As a soldier of The Great Demon Kingdom, Lord Conrart Weller obeyed the words of The True King and brought this valuable soul that was to become the next Demon King to this far away other world.

Although, he does not yet know if this is its proper destination.

While it was moving straight ahead, it was an unexpectedly enjoyable vehicle to ride in. In exchange for the swaying and creaking peculiar to carriages, his body was tossed back and forth when it made a turn, but if it can move this fast then he just had to put up with a bit of discomfort.

"Ah I'm sorry, I'm always going too fast. Anyway, it's small but come on in and make yourself at home."

The white robed man unlocked the door to a building that looked like an office and pushed up a protuberance sticking out of the wall. As soon as he did so, white light came down from the ceiling.

Thinking that this man can use magic as well, Conrad surreptitiously lets his shoulders slump. So this wasn't a country I could just casually visit without a sword or magic power.

The repainted walls were a light blue and there were two couches lined up together. There was one of those moving picture boxes here, but its surface was gray and there wasn't any light or sound coming out of it. When he pushed open the inside door, the small room on the other side was pure white all over and there were shelves, a desk, and an unusually high-up day bed. The entire room was steeped in the smell of medicine.

"This is the examination room. It might not look like it, but I'm kind of a doctor. But, even if I say that you won't understand. We need to do something about your language skills, huh?"

It's a bit smaller than the one before, but there is a whitish box sitting on the desk. There are several pipes sticking out of the back. At the top there are three figurines standing at each interval. The short and stout one with the red helmet and armor seemed especially evil. It's probably for magic ceremonies.

"Ah! Don't touch my Gelgoog, okay?" (1)

The too-skinny man retreated into the adjoining room in a big hurry and came back holding a dark brown box. What came out were grandiose earmuffs. If you put something so heavy over both of your ears, you would have a hard time marching in winter. Even if it isn't gear for cold weather, wouldn't the cord and rod hanging out of the left side get in the way?

The laugh lines on the white robed man's face deepened even more as he brought the rod to his lips and said clearly, "Don't touch my Gundam models."

Then, he handed the earmuffs over and indicated that he should put them on. When he carefully lowered them onto his head and they touched both of his ears, a few dozen languages came flowing out in succession.

“Whoa.”

“Huh, no good?”

The man seemed disappointed as he watched him reflexively take off the apparatus. He seems to have thought that the problem would have been solved just like that.

To think that there were bizarre items resembling Anissina’s inventions in this strange land as well.

“Well I guess I have no choice. Sit up here on this examination table. Now put the headphones back on. Ah, I’ll leave your important object by your pillow.”

Because he’s pantomiming everything with his hands, it looks like he’s putting on a dance production. Thinking that it would be useless to resist at this point, Conrad sits down on the day bed as instructed and puts on the awkward earmuffs once again.

“Lesson 1!”

When the white robed man connects the cord to a box, an energetic woman suddenly started talking.

“Haroo hau aa yuu? Hello, how are you? Aimu fain sankyuu. I’m fine, thank you.”

“I’m gonna have you diligently learn English in one night.”

It gradually gets louder. His head feels like it’s going to split apart. And yet, there is no mercy in the woman’s voice.

“Ai amu piitaa. I am Peter. Aa yuu piitaa? Are you Peter?”

Please stop, noo aimu notto piitaa!

(1) A Gelgoog is a mobile suit from Gundam. Since it’s red I’m going to guess that it’s the commander type that Char Aznable piloted. Here’s a pic (
[\[spoiler to pic\]](#)
)

* * * * *

You’re telling me that this is The True King’s will!?

Having me bring the soul of the next Demon King to another world?

With silver hair drooping onto the polished floor, The True King’s priestess replied with a blank look. Her mouth is definitely smiling, but she isn’t showing the tiniest bit of kindness.

“Deciding whether this soul will be the next Demon King and whether it will live in a world beyond even His Majesty’s control is His Majesty The True King’s will. Lord Conrart Weller, granting you this duty is also the word of His Majesty himself.”

Even though he’s someone who died thousands of years ago.

Conrad willfully pushes down that fleeting doubt that floated up in his mind. Everyone has

that doubt at some point – how exactly the late His Majesty The True King can still speak to the kingdom.

“No, there is no fault in doubting. For someone who was injured as you were, it is something even more difficult to believe with your emotions awry. It would be nice if we could tell you how His Majesty’s spirit speaks to us even though he has already passed on.” The priestess’s tone was calm and quiet and there was no sympathy to be found within it. “Even if you doubt the existence of His Majesty, we will still entrust you with this soul. Because, that is The True King’s will and it is the only correct path.”

His image was reflected on the unblemished surface of the marble floor. It was a pitiful image of himself from which he could only feel sorrow and regret as he hung his head without the courage to live or the will to die.

Now that he thinks about it, he hasn’t felt anger in a while.



“... I might run away. I might betray your expectations and hopes and just disappear with this. Or maybe I might smash this bottle against a rock, pluck out the flickering light and give it to someone I want to. And it wouldn't be unthinkable for me to then raise that child as I saw fit and manipulate the power befitting a Demon King to overthrow this kingdom!”

“You could also embrace that soul and then end your life with your own hands.” Without moving even a strand of her silver hair, the priestess smiled apathetically. “If that is what you wish, do so. We will only tell you the words of His Majesty The True King. You doubt the existence of His Majesty, but in the past there have been several people who have heard His Majesty’s voice.”

I hadn’t heard of that.

“Yes, His Majesty The True King met with Lady von Wincott as well.”

Conrad was not brave enough to raise his head so he kept staring at his reflection.

“Before Suzanna Julia died, I heard that she spoke briefly with His Majesty and gladly accepted that her soul would become the next Demon King. However, she had just one wish...”

The figure reflected on the marble floor violently lurched forward. Conrad fell to his knees on the cold stone and covered his face with his scarred hands.

“... that her soul would be entrusted to you.”

Part 2

“Je t’aime mon amour Peter!”

Conrad screamed and jumped to his feet at the loud confession of love.

“Oh, sorry sorry. It skipped from the Gettysburg Address to France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man straight to French.”

“French? The French Republic: size, approximately 544,000 square kilometers; population, approximately 56 million; capital, Paris; west coast climate, oceanic... what is this!?”

“Awesome! That’s a NASA brand product for you! You’re a native speaker in one night. This is actually for aliens, but I guess it’s effective on humans as well.”

It was bright outside the window and it had gotten warmer in the examination room. The difference in temperatures between night and day in the desert was intense.

It was almost noon and the rising temperature was sure to be a nuisance eventually.

Conrad opened the lid of the tin by his pillow and checked that the object he was entrusted with was still inside. He then carefully surveyed the room and then looked down at his arms and legs. After that, he finally focused on the man in the white robes in front of him and admired his laugh lines.

“... You’re always in a good mood, aren’t you?”

“You really can speak English now! That’s amazing! Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“... Are you Peter?”

“No no no, I’m not Peter. I’m Jose Rodriguez. Not Noboribetsu, Rodriguez.” (1)

“Hello, Mr. Rodriguez. How are you? I am Weller Conrart... How long should I keep listening to this?”

Rodriguez pushes up his glasses and checks a few documents lying on the desk. “Oh, Conrart is your last name? Sorry, I messed up and wrote Conrad Weller. But anyway, you’ll have a hard time without a social security number so I went ahead and prepared an ID. Ah, and this is an American Express Gold Card for your travel expenses.” (2)

“Who are you? Why do you have the same thing that I do? How do you know about me and why can you use that sort of magic?”

“Hm, well you’ve livened up.” The abnormally skinny doctor came to his own conclusions and turned on an antique computer. “Well I actually want to have breakfast before anything. I stitched up that cut on the side of your eye while you were sleeping, but it was bleeding a lot and if it was just a centimeter to the left, you would have definitely been blinded. If that had happened, I wouldn’t have been able to do anything. I’m the only doctor in this town and even though I’m in charge of this clinic, we only have the bare minimum of equipment and I don’t specialize in surgery. Now then, let’s clear up your doubts, shall we? First, you probably want to know where this is. Look here.”

Conrad collapsed into a nearby chair from lightheadedness from his sudden movements. They are now in just the right positions for a doctor-patient relationship. Rodriguez points at the middle of the computer display.

“This is a map of the Earth and this is the American continent. Take a good look, okay?”

Right, this is a town called El Salvallo right on the border of Mexico in the state of New Mexico in The United States. You get all that?" (3)

"Do you perhaps specialize in pediatrics?"

Rodriguez clapped his hands together in exaggerated surprise and his laugh lines deepened.

"You just read my mind, didn't you!? That's awesome! Demons from the other world really can use magic!"

"*You're* the one who can use magic."

"What? Making things move and having words read into your ears are things that people with ESP do, not demons. Demons like us all across the world are all leading honest lives and going strong."

Eh!? Then what was that new type of military tank? How did that box with the moving pictures and the dazzling lights...

Like a dam breaking, ideas and theories came flooding into his brain. Oh, a car. Oh, television. Oh, electricity. Ford, Japanese, Edison, Einstein, Graham Bell, Honda, Souichirou... What is what?

"Conrad, get a hold of yourself!"

"... I have to at least verify that you're a demon of Earth. Seeing that your hair and eyes are both black, you must be a rather high-ranked noble."

"Well now you're just saying something racist. It's not good to judge people by their looks. I'm a complete commoner and more importantly, demons don't have ranks. There are a vast amount of humans with black hair and eyes on Earth."

"Humans!? This isn't a demon country?"

"Like I said, this is The United States of America. It's a land that has every race of people."

It might have been obvious, but there wasn't any information in the NASA data about demon life. Since it might take yet another night to get the whole story, he figured he would ask about the essentials.

There is no country with only demons. They are spread about the world and are living as normal humans. The reason they live like that is because demons on Earth do not possess any remarkable special abilities. Some do have better reflexes and excel in their own individual ways, but the vast majority only tend to live a bit longer than usual and have no real differences in their appearance and abilities compared to humans.

"There are even those that go their entire lives without realizing that they *are* demons. As for me, my mother came out to me so I've known since I was a child. Demons who have lived a while and gained experience can tell at first glance who's a demon or not. Even in your case, Justin – who lives by the gate – called me up and told me that 'A demon with different hair came.'" (4)

"Ah, that old man who seemed to be over 400. So he was a demon, not a human..."

Tapping his pen on the desk, Rodriguez said amusedly, "Justin is 82."

"... Wait, there's no way he's younger than I am..."

"You're that old? You look like a handsome high school kid from any angle."

As Conrad sat there in indescribable shock, the doctor kept on talking and said something that was like kicking a man while he was down.

"The Ortigas at the house you stayed at last night, Keisha and Carlos, are fully-fledged,

human immigrants from Mexico. So, even if you told them your mission, I don't think that they would understand. Oh wait, nonononono, not just that! You absolutely *cannot* tell them that you're a demon. The people around here are all devout catholics so if they hear that you're a demon they'll think you're a devil with horns. Devils have a bad rep, after all. Seems like they did a lot of bad things."

"... The True King is sending Julia's soul to a land like this..?"

Stretching out his hunched back, Rodriguez opens a locked drawer and takes out the wooden box he had seen last night. A perfect sphere continuously giving off a peculiar, bluish-white glow was resting within the small bottle sealed with red augite.

"So yours used to be Julia. This person used to be Christine, but for various reasons I'm taking care of her. Actually, who they were in their previous life and complicated stuff like that is supposed to completely disappear, but... it seems they're both special... At any rate, my job ends after I introduce you to Bob and hand you over with ex-Christine. That being said, Bob went to Costa Rica for an emergency and can't be back for about a week. Business is difficult even if you're the Demon King. He's always going on about how it would be nice if he could use clone technique magic."

Well you know, that's a ninja technique, not magic.

When he finally got away from Dr. Rodriguez, who wanted to give him an IV drip, the sun was already high in the sky.

It seems like I'll have to pass the time in this town until this Demon King of Earth named Bob comes back to the country. But referring to His Majesty The Demon King as just 'Bob'? It was a rather frank underground organization.

"The word 'frank' just naturally pops into my mind."

According to the doctor, I guess that means I'm in the process of becoming a native speaker?

He couldn't just sit in the examination room so he absently wanders towards town. For the time being, he would get something to eat and think about where he would stay. El Salvallo is a small town so it's unlikely that there would be a hotel or motel. The doctor had said that he could stay at the clinic.

He also very politely said, 'I'm not gay so don't worry!' but it was obvious that he wasn't interested in the same sex just by looking at the posters of beautiful women on his wall. There were five of them.

It took five minutes to get to the main street and was a distance that a man in his eighties with an injury on his forehead would be able to manage, but the burning sunlight and clouds of dust mercilessly sapped at his strength.

Turning off the main street to escape, he walked down the slightly shaded side roads. Drawn towards a familiar garage, he steps into the cool building. Conrad ran his hand over the smooth car frame and laughed to himself. He'd thought it was a heavily armored vehicle, but it was for ordinary travelling.

"Is someone there?"

Keisha's voice, which was just sound to him yesterday, has now become proper words. When she recognized Conrad, the hostess rushed over as if she were stumbling. On the other side of the open door was a calm and peaceful restaurant at lunchtime.

"Were you alright? Did anyone do anything to you?"

She has grabbed him by the shoulders and won't let go. Even though he knows it is rude, he unintentionally gives a strained laugh at her frantic actions.

"I'm sorry for troubling you last night."

"That's fine you don't... Oh, you can understand."

"My memory came back." It was an excuse he thought up right on the spot. "I came to see Doctor Rodriguez, but I got my wallet and credit card stolen along the way. I ended up having to hitchhike, but of all people the driver of the car that stopped was gay. He made a move on me and I panicked so I jumped out of the car while it was still moving and ended up hitting my head and that gave me temporary amnesia."

Inside his head he was exclaiming 'How's that!' in a victory pose. From the data input, he gathered together the information on the current state of America and tried lying.

"A good person is a good person, though," he added.

"Well... I suppose."

"But thanks to Dr. Rodriguez and NASA, I got my credit card and memories back."

"Well... the power of space is amazing..."

Why does she have such a troubled look on her face?

"That's right, have you remembered your name too?"

Judging from the calculation method he just learned, this woman is probably around thirty. He had believed that she was older than him yesterday, but this means that she's actually a lot younger. When Conrad was about to answer her question, a child crashed into his side with all her strength.

"Conraaad!"

"Nikki, how do you know!?"

"Mr. Justin told meee!"

The old man was waving at them half asleep from a table in the middle of the shop.

Carrying a tray with bread and eggs in his right hand and a beer bottle for the old man in his left, Conrad approached him.

"I hear you were the one who found me."

Justin slightly opens one eye and spies the green bottle. Slowly wiping off the frost with his thumb, he takes a gulp like an old man.

"Well, after you live a while you learn how to tell the difference in hair."

"I'm older than you, but I thought that everyone in this town was a demon."

"Now that's something." The old man laughed so hard it looked like his dentures might slip out of place. "So there are people who have pointless long lives as well."

"That's harsh."

"Well, whether you're long-lived or short-lived it all comes down to what you can do before you die. If you die incapable then you'll have regrets and you won't be able to go back to being a nice soul."

"Regrets?"

"Yeah." Taking a large second swig, Justin rolled his closed eyes. "Everyone has a regret or two. If you have them and you die, your soul won't become perfectly round. So, there's hardly ever perfectly round, unbroken souls. If by some lucky chance you get your hands on one, you

have to treat it carefully.”

He moves to grab at his chest. However, if he did that at this place, it would tell everyone that he had something in his pocket. How much does this old man know? As much as Rodriguez?

“What are you talking about?”

Underneath his pure white eyebrows, the wrinkles in the dry skin change.

The stitches from his injury suddenly start to ache and Conrad grimaces a bit.

“About after death.”

Be careful. If you carelessly have regrets, you won’t be able to go back to being a perfect soul. But, if you get a hold of a perfectly round one, you have to treat it with great care.

“But you know, after sniffing out all of these bizarre things happening recently, this old man’s nose is tired. This town is getting more and more noisy and dangerous.”

(1) This is a joke on how similar Noboribetsu and Rodriguez (Rodorigezu) sound, but I honestly think it’s a bit of a stretch ^-^. Noboribetsu is a city in Hokkaido about four miles away from a town called Noboribetsu Onsen which is the largest hot spring town in Hokkaido.

(2) Conrart is not his last name ^-^ I mentioned this before, but demons introduce themselves last name first as per usual when speaking Japanese. This gets lost when translating to English, but there is a very clear distinction made this way between humans and demons in the original Japanese. Demons are referred to as Weller (Lord) Conrart, Grisela (Lord) Gegenhuber, Gurrier Josak, etc., while the humans are referred to as Flynn Gilbit, Stefan Fanberlain, Nigel Wise Maxine, and Dunheely Weller.

(3) I forgot to footnote this in the first part, but El Salvallo isn’t an actual town. Personally, I think that a better way to write it would be El Sahuayo (the kana being ‘eru sawaiyo’), but the fandom has long since decided that the town is called El Salvallo~

(4) Linguistic note! The word for ‘came out’ here is specifically the one used for when homosexuals come out and is actually Katakana English (kamingu auto).

* * * * *

He passed the time helping out with the busy store in the afternoon and then when it filled up at night, he even took customer’s orders with his now fluent English. Even if it’s the first job he’s had in his entire life, he made out okay after a bit of effort. Although, if it were Conrad’s brothers in this situation, their pride would have gotten in the way and this might have been impossible.

He didn’t think that the fact that he was raised as more of a commoner than a noble because one of his parents was human would come in handy in a place like this.

The customers who came in for food and drinks seemed to think that Conrad, walking around in a red and white, plaid apron taking orders, was a new part-time employee. There were even female customers who would place their small tips right into his apron instead of leaving it

on the table.

"If things keep going like this, you're going to get rich."

Putting the small change into Carlos's pocket, Conrad says with a laugh, "Maybe I should buy this place and become the new owner."

"Do it."

Receiving an extremely serious answer, Conrad tucks the stainless steel tray under his arm. The boy takes two bottles of cola out of the refrigerator and gives one to the new waiter. Reflecting to himself that even the soft drinks in this country are black, Conrad takes a sip of the sweet liquid. Before he could taste the sweetness, a sort of tingling sensation ran over his tongue.

"... In three months, this place is going to be sold. Mom is paying rent, but when the owner changes we don't know if we're going to be able to keep on doing this. They said they're going to tear down this place and the neighbors' on both sides and build a hotel and casino."

"Keisha has no intention of buying this place?"

Carlos shakes his head in resignation.

"We can't get a contract unless we can pay it in full when we sign it. They said things like since we're immigrants and my dad's not around anymore we won't be able to pay it all. We don't have a savings account or any collateral so even the banks won't lend us money."

"These banks are unkind."

"To us they are."

Surprised by the roundness of the moon in the sky while he was taking the full trash bags from the garage out to the street, Conrad pulled the small bottle out of his breast pocket and looked at it. He overlaps the bluish-white sphere with the moon to check it. The moonlight was yellower.

"... A perfect sphere."

A soul without regret.

If what the priestess said was true, Julia spoke with His Majesty The True King before her life ended.

She gladly accepted that her soul would become the next Demon King and died. Gladly.

Her one wish was...

"That I would carry this."

Julia, why did you wish for something like that?

Did you think I wouldn't mourn your death?

Did you wish for me to go on a journey to realize the truth?

If I were able to forget you and live on, my heart would be so much more at ease. If only we hadn't met in the first place. That day, if only I hadn't gone to give my opinion on your dress like mother asked of me.

I wouldn't have had to go through this pain.

"What's that?"

He didn't move at all at the question directed at his back.

He had been told not to carelessly reveal that he was a demon, but he wasn't told to hide what the light was. Conrad's personal opinion was that it wouldn't matter if it was a child that he told.



"It's something that is going to be born."

"... An egg?"

"No. If this isn't inside an egg, the egg will never be born."

"A yolk?"

He smiles at the twelve year old's straight answer.

"It's an important person's soul. Ah, you don't have to believe it. It's probably something unreal for Americans."

"You don't have to bury it, right? You can just keep holding onto it forever? Then I want one too."

"I can't keep it forever. She's going to be reborn soon... No, it's not her or anyone anymore. The sins and memories have all been erased and now it's just a pure white soul."

Perhaps because he remembered his father, Carlos's gaze fell on his younger sister staying up late.

"Dad died in an unlucky accident and then Nikki was born right after. So, me and mom and even the priest thought that he had been reborn at first."

There was a low sound of a cowbell and the door to the shop opened wide. Keisha will have a hard time by herself if they don't go back inside. Carlos turned his body away, but kept his gaze on his sister as he kept talking.

"... But we were wrong. I mean, dad was a man and Nikki was a girl. She looks more like Dad than she does Mom, but their faces aren't the same. Getting reborn and stuff like that, they don't go the way you want."

"Most of the time, yeah."

"... Sometimes, I'm jealous of my sister."

The mother calls her son's name.

"Nikki never met Dad when he was alive. She doesn't even know what kind of person he was. She's never had to say goodbye to anyone so when she thinks about him she doesn't want to cry."

Because she had never met him in the first place.

"But Mom, she-, yeah I'm coming!"

Kicking over the garbage can, Carlos ran back into the garage. Conrad followed him through the partition and returned to washing the dirty dishes that had piled up. He squeezed plenty of soap on the sponge and scrubbed the stuck on oil in a frying pan. The boy sneaks glances at the television to check the score in the game.

"But mom says the opposite. She says that it's sad that Nikki doesn't know Dad's face and that I'm lucky for being able to remember him."

"Is that true?"

"I dunno. Mom says that when she feels sad, there are three people that support her. Me, Nikki, and Dad. She says I have three people, too. Mom, Nikki, and Dad. Dad's not around anymore so I don't think I have to do my best for him, but she says that since I remember when he encouraged me when he was alive that he's supporting me." He shrugs his shoulders in a grown-up way with his arms covered in soap suds up to his elbows. "I don't really know about that, though."

"... You humans are really smart."

You don't even live half as long as we do and you know so much more about the world than demons. You even understand the mutual relationship between yourselves and someone who has died and left you.

"I feel like I'm slowly starting to understand why the Earth is becoming mainly human."

The young doctor taking care of him comes into the store and looks around over the top of his glasses. It seems like he's looking for someone. He's invited over to several tables, but he declines with his eyes so scrunched up they almost disappear from view. When he sees Conrad in the kitchen, he comes near with a smile across his entire face.

"I heard from Bob."

"When will he be back?"

"Neeext month. He said there was a dispute in Costa Rica. Angering the Demon King. There are some brave businessmen out there, huh?"

"Shh!"

He inconspicuously points towards the boy with his thumb. Aren't you the longtime resident of El Salvallo who told me not to talk about demons?

"Hm? I'm talking about the Demon King of the financial world."

"You know someone important in finance?" Carlos asked with a serious look. "Then ask if he'll lend money to Mom. We'll work hard and pay back every bit of the loan."

"Well, if I get to know a banker then I'll ask as soon as possible."

This time, Rodriguez lowered his voice and brought his face close before whispering, "So I managed to get him to tell me the destination for *that*. China, Hong Kong and Japan. Ex-Christine lived in Hong Kong so it might be easier to choose over there. I'm 100% for Japan though."

"Not this country?"

"Well countries that aren't overly religious are a lot easier to live in. Also, Japan is really awesome. I studied abroad in Hokkaido in college. It's a hundred times colder than here, though."

Because it's where Julia will... no, where the next Demon King will be born, it should have the best environment possible. Safety, medical services, education, philosophy. There's no point in doing all of this if it's not a country where everything is in order.

Conrad dries the frying pan with a rag and extends a hand out to the knife and fork that Carlos is using in a pretend swordfight.

So I didn't carefully hold that which belonged to no one and disappear? Or smash the bottle against a rock and end my life before that floating ball of light even though I threatened to do so.

If that is what you wish, do so.

So you saw through it all.

"At any rate, Japan is... ah!"

With an explosive sound that could rupture an eardrum, the glass in the door was blown away. The cowbell was shaking wildly, but the lively sound was drowned out.

A huge pillar of fire rose in the street and quickly changed to black smoke.

The customers and workers in the shop were all overcome with shock and some were frozen in place halfway to their feet.

"... My... Honda..."

Rodriguez recovered first and ran across the glass covered floor. Apparently that black smoke was coming from his beloved car. There isn't anything left from when it was a pretty, sky blue.

"Get down!" Keisha screamed and before anyone could react, there was a short explosive

sound.

Conrad grabbed Carlos around the neck and pushed him to the floor and then moved him to the garage while crouching low to the ground. Forgetting to even cry out, Nikki was standing with her eyes wide open.

"Come here. We'll go to your big brother."

So this is a gunshot I'm hearing for the first time? I thought each shot would be much slower, but for someone who's only experienced battlefields with swords and magic, a machine gun is as threatening as heavy artillery.

He carefully handed over the young girl to Carlos who sat on the ground with his arms outstretched. Once she came into contact with her older brother's arms, Nikki started crying like a flame had been lit.

"Keisha."

Obedying orders, the customers in the shop were all admirably pressed against the floor with their heads covered and under the tables. As she was trying to run over to her children, Conrad said to her while still in a crouch, "Carlos and Nikki are under the sink so they're okay. More importantly, who are those guys?"

They keep driving by in a moss green jeep and shooting while shouting strangely. Every once in a while there is a large explosion so they might be throwing grenades.

"They were here last night too, remember? The young men. They do a lot of drugs. They snort so they don't leave tracks on their arms. They get drunk and high and then do things like that."

"Only the glass on the door is broken and the bullets aren't coming into the store. It looks like they're shooting into the air. Stay down like this, I'll go check on the doctor."

"It's dangerous, call the sheriff."

"Even though I look young, I have a lot of military experience."

Although it was on battlefields with only swords, axes, and bows.

As soon as they passed by, he quickly slips out through the doorframe. Rodriguez was crouched down right under the window and gazing at his beloved car with his mouth hanging wide open.

"Doctor. Doctor! Rodriguez!"

He finally comes to his senses.

"They... my Honda... aw that's not the worst of it!"

The deputy who had tried to corner Conrad went running by while putting on a bulletproof vest. All of the cars were destroyed and even shops that were already closed were burning. Black smoke was rising up into the night sky.

"They're shooting into the sky. They're not targeting people, but those molotovs are made with gasoline. They're throwing those everywhere... They're coming back."

"How many were there?"

"Three."

"Okay. Can you take care of this?"

"Hey, isn't this ex-Julia?"

"That's right. She's not used to combat."

Rodriguez eyebrows shot up unlike with his normal smile and grabbed Conrad's sleeve.

“Stop. The sheriff and his deputies are here.”

“But Nikki won’t stop crying.”

The deputies run alongside the jeep and try to pull the young men out of it, but obviously they couldn’t keep up with its speed and they ended up taking aim with their guns.

“... They don’t seem to have much combat experience.”

“El Salvallo was a peaceful place!”

Which means that they are different than me who was being attacked right up until I departed.

He now regrets that he dropped his sword. A smile unconsciously works its way onto his face.

This is strange. Just a half a day ago, I was masochistically thinking that I wouldn’t mind being cut down by the first person I ran across. I was in such despair that I wouldn’t have been troubled in the least if I had died. It’s clearly strange.

How funny.

Conrad reached into the wreckage of the doctor’s beloved car and tore off a handy rod. After timing when the jeep would pass by, his second step was to jump from the roof of the Honda.

He holds down the driver’s neck with his heel and immobilizes him. He then hits the blonde youth holding his gun in the air with his fists and elbows to his heart’s content. The man who now had a concussion fell out of the jeep.

The man in charge of the molotovs sitting in the back seat got his face smashed into the wreckage of a car. When Conrad turns his attention to the driver, he stops struggling and lifts up both of his hands.

“Stop! Don’t let go of the wheel!”

* * * * *

Sadly, the doctor’s misfortune didn’t stop with only his beloved car being burned.

When he went back to his clinic in a panic, he found that his workplace was ablaze.

A fire truck valiantly stopped the fire from spreading, but his house was completely engulfed in flames and was beyond help.

“My Gelgoog! My Z’Gok! My Zeooooong!” (1)

While he yelled out these proper nouns for which there was no NASA data on, Rodriguez was going crazy trying to run into the burning building to save his Gundam models. His limbs were incredibly strong for being so thin and Conrad somehow managed to stop him by pinning his arms behind his back. This is his first experience with sudden surges of strength at the scene of a fire.

Nevertheless, with the clinic being the only other thing completely burned down besides his car, should this really be brushed off as coincidence? The two demons returned to the shop with little comment, gripping their respective bottles they needed to protect.

As the only doctor in this town, Rodriguez had to give medical treatment to the injured even if that person was a hostile junkie that burned his home and business to ashes.

As they watched the good doctor, whose greatest feature was his laugh lines, check the pulse on a young man's jawbone, everyone's emotions flared at the outrageousness. Those unable to control their anger left, first one, then another.

When the deputy came over to Conrad who was still wrapped in bandages, he asked him as he rubbed his stubbly beard, "What's that?"

"Ah, this is from yesterday."

"Oh, that's right. I met you last night."

It's no use. Even though I did a good deed, this guy is going ask about my personal history anyway. Instead of interrogating an upstanding demon like myself, go investigate those minors who were doing drugs and burned down a car and a house.

"Where did you learn how to do that? What about school? You not going? What's your address? What about your parents?"

"My mother is a healthy and beautiful woman."

I wonder if this is a believable response coming from a teenager.

"My house if far away. I'm not going to high school, but I was in the boy scouts so I'm good at riding in jeeps."

There is something green hanging out of the mouth of the young man with the machine gun and the concussion. Rodriguez snatched it up and clicked his tongue in a move unlike him.

"It's another new one. But to chew the leaves the old-fashioned way? I don't think he's just a normal, bored teenager."

The sheriff took the object away in a plastic bag. They had the same plants in the pockets of their cargo pants. Conrad took just a single leaf so no one would notice and then smelled it and examined its veins.

I know this from somewhere...

There was a hunched over old man standing a short distance away from the crowd. It was the old demon that was near the town's entrance. His eyes that were hard to tell if they were open or not were wavy bumps under his pure white eyebrows.

"Mr. Justin."

"I thought I smelled something I never smelled before."

"... This is similar to a plant we use for spells in The Great D-... in the land we live in. Not just similar, it might be just that."

The wrinkles increased on the old man's dry skin.

"It might be."

"Do you have any idea how they might have gotten a hold of this? For example, does it grow nearby... I don't think it would be in the desert, though."

"To my old nose and eyes, that doesn't look like a leaf from around here. You can believe what you want, but I've never smelled that before on this world."

Conrad fell silent for a moment and toyed with the dangerous plant in his hands. If this came from his homeland, then was it by accident or on purpose? If it's the latter, who did it and why?

Do they want to keep Julia's soul from being used for the new Demon King? Or are they planning something even more cunning and intend to steal this, give it to someone they choose, and raise an easily manipulated king?

If so, burning down the clinic would have had too great of a risk of destroying their target as

well.

Destruction.

The short word floats up in Conrad's mind and his mood turns melancholy. Was their goal destruction and chaos?

If they lost the contents of the bottle, The Great Demon Kingdom would fall into chaos after losing their next Demon King. If this was all for that goal, then there was the concern that he would be targeted right up until the moment that his mission was fulfilled.

The chances were low, but he also couldn't disregard the possibility that their target might have been Rodriguez's bottle and not Conrad's.

At any rate, it wouldn't hurt to be vigilant. A skilled practitioner of magic or a small platoon was not necessary for someone to carry out their objective. This incident clearly demonstrated that all that was needed was a plant used for spells that could cause someone to lose their mind and a violent human.

His mouth naturally twists into a smile. He would have to get a weapon from somewhere.

"... A perfectly round sphere."

"Eh?"

The old man opened just his right eye and looked into Conrad's silver-flecked irises.

"If you have regrets left over when you die, you can't go back to being a perfect soul. In order to not have any regrets, the previous owner of a perfect soul would need to have the ability to clearly see beyond even beyond their own death."

"Julia would have?"

Did she clearly see beyond even beyond her own death?

"Looks like you've gotten a lot better, Conrad."

With his shoulders drooped feebly, the doctor came back to him after finishing his treatments. His white robe and stethoscope were both burned so now he only had the clothes on his back as well.

"Did my NASA come in handy?"

"Doctor, I think I have to leave this place."

"Huh, but my job is to escort you to Bob's place unharmed. I'll get in trouble if I carelessly let you go out into an unknown land and you end up missing."

His Gelgoog getting burned must have been quite a shock because his laugh lines have no depth to them.

"Conrad!" Carlos yelled his name over and over again as he came running at full speed.

"Thank goodness! You don't look like you have any new injuries."

"New injuries?"

Conrad Weller gave a bitter laugh and pressed on the bandages on his forehead.

"You did something so scary! Mom is really worried."

"Keisha is a caring person who worries a lot. Your mother is a wonderful woman."

The boy made a face as if to say 'of course!' and tugged on the new waiter's apron.

"Let's go back. Nikki's waiting too."

The early morning of a desert land looks like it's about to start any moment. On the horizon without much vegetation and between the rocky mountains, rays of orange light were peeking out. The first breeze starts blowing away the designs drawn during the night.

Conrad unties the strings to his plaid apron, folds it quickly and hands it to Carlos.

"I have to go."

"Where?"

"I don't know. I have to go meet someone, talk to them, and then hand over the object I was entrusted with."

As a general rule, children were more sensitive than adults. Without saying anything else, the boy understood everything.

"That soul."

"Yes. I made a promise."

"I get it."

Carlos gave a big nod and with a serious expression, told him to be safe.

"Be careful not to get run over in the middle of the road by a school bus."

"I will. Tell Keisha and Nikki goodbye for me. Ah, and if I happen to meet a banker, I'll strongly recommend that they give a loan to your mother."

"Thank you... Conrad."

After clinging to Conrad's waist for a few seconds, Carlos stretches as high as he can and forcefully shoves his cap onto Conrad's head.

"You'll be in trouble if you collapse from heat stroke."

"Yeah..."

The child ran back to the house at full speed without turning around or making any solemn gestures of thanks or farewell because he knew it would just be more painful.

(1) Once again, a bunch of mobile suits from Gundam ^-^ All three were used by the Principality of Zeon. I footnoted the Gelgoog in the previous part, but here are links to the wiki pages if you want to see the other two: [Z'gok](#), [Zeong](#).

* * * * *

"Okay, but why don't you wait until the bus leaves?"

He didn't have a car or luggage or a horse or anything besides the small bottle in his pocket. The two of them are walking along the cracked asphalt while gasping for air. Actually, the only one out of breath was Rodriguez and Conrad, who was leading the way, has been energetic ever since two days before.

Because of that, his gait naturally widens and the distance between him and the man in back widens as well.

"You didn't need to come along as well."

"But like I said, my job is to introduce you to Bob and then hand you over along with Christine. What am I going to do if I abandon you and you end up in an accident?"

"But," Conrad stops and turns around, placing his hands on the visor of the midnight blue cap, "There was only one doctor in El Salvallo so is it alright if you come?"

"Yeah, after all, the catholic church is sending someone over tomorrow. Since the clinic burned down, they figured they'd have medical examinations after mass for the time being."

"Be that as it may... who and for what reason?"

"Stop, stop. If you try to think about difficult things in the heat you won't come up with the right answer. Hey, why don't we wait for an intercity bus here and catch a nap inside in the cool air?"

"If we just absently stand around here, we'll collapse from thirst. And anyway, wouldn't it be a bit embarrassing if a school bus passed us?"

Even though it had just passed six o'clock, the sunlight in the empty desert was merciless. There are few intercity buses passing through here. There are only two: one in the morning and one in the evening.

"For now we just need to head in this direction, right?"

"Yeah, um, I have demon contacts in Santa Fe so we should go there first and explain our situation. Before that, we need to head to the nearest town, Las Cruces. We're going to dry up and die if we keep going like this... We'll get in contact with Bob from there... Even so, I don't have a single penny on me."

"I have the American Express card."

He holds up the gold card he just got the day before up to his face. The sunlight reflects off of it directly onto Rodriguez and he crumples like a vampire in the morning sun.

"It's hot."

"Pull yourself together. You were born and raised in the United States weren't you?"

The sound of a perfectly running engine in the distance comes closer and stops by the squatting doctor and the traveler standing there with his arms crossed over his chest.

It's a red Toyota pickup truck.

"Hey Doctor."

"Hey Conrad."

Hiding his pleasant surprise, Conrad waves a hand at the Owen brothers.

"Good afternoon."

The one with the thick eyebrows and long beard sitting in the driver's seat sticks his head out of the window.

"Where are you going at this time of day? Did you get in trouble with a lady friend and now you have to escape at dawn?"

"I don't have a lady friend."

"Hm, you seemed to be friendly with Keisha."

To them it looked like an older woman together with a teenager, but for all intents and purposes it was a man over eighty with a much younger woman. It is unlikely that they would fall in love.

"... Hm, well whatever, I won't ask. We're going all the way to Albuquerque, but if you want to ride in back we'll give you a ride." Clicking his tongue at the now smiling Rodriguez, he points to the truck bed with his thumb. "... Well, I mean it doesn't look like the doctor will make it all the way to Las Cruces looking like that."

“Thank you.”

His listless attitude from before completely gone, Rodriguez climbed up into the Toyota in mere moments with deft movements. Pushing aside the solid tools whose use he didn't know, he cheekily leans back against the back of the driver's seat.

The truck took off smoothly along with the Owen brothers' out of tune singing. The dry wind caresses his cheeks, arms, and legs and flows in the opposite direction they are moving.

“I really am going to suggest Japan, 100%.”

“What's this, all of sudden?”

“Because,” the doctor grasps his breast pocket and watches the asphalt pass at a comfortable pace, “in Japan, demons are heroes of justice. They have green wings and long ears.”

“Long ears?”

“Well, no one knows that I'm partial to Japan and I can't let anyone know, though. That reminds me, have I told you that Bob looks just like a Hollywood actor..?”

He chatted to the man next to him and sometimes he laughed and sometimes he got angry and sulked.

The brothers in the driver's seat changed their song and a men's duet of horrible singing voices reverberated out. The Japanese-made engine in the pickup truck didn't vibrate much and when it sped up, a strong wind almost blew away his cap.

The desert goes on forever.

The waves of sand change their design moment by moment.

Julia

Welcome to Earth.

Everyone is singing that for you.

Epilogue

“... Th-that’s it, tosa.”

The moment that they connected all of the scribbling together into a short story, Lord Günter von Christ and the editor from The Central Literary Institute of The Great Demon Kingdom, Badwik Folkloke, fell silent.

After putting the scraps of paper back with nervous hand movements, Günter quietly closes the red-covered diary.

“... T-to think that such a secret existed, tosa... To think that His Majesty The Demon King’s soul... belonged to Suzanna Julia in its past life...”

Now that he says that, it actually explains a few things. When Adalbert had shook up Yuuri’s brain and he became able to understand this world’s language, Günter himself had said:

‘He drew out the stored language skills from a gap in Your Majesty’s soul. All souls without exception have the accumulated memories of all of their past ‘lives.’ Of course, normally the doors to that knowledge do not open and the soul only utilizes information it has gained in its new ‘life.’ However, that man pried the door open and forcefully drew out a portion of those memories. Since there was knowledge of our language there, that is proof that Your Majesty’s soul was once in this world.’

If that was the case, then why could he speak perfectly but be completely incapable of reading text? Why exactly could he read the engraving on the back of Morgif’s guard by touching it with his fingertips when he could not make any sense of the words by sight?

Suzanna Julia was not blessed with sight at birth, but she could read at a considerable pace by feeling engraved letters.

And if Adalbert had carelessly used that savage technique and brought her memories to the surface from the depths of Yuuri’s soul...

And the only one who knew this was Lord Conrart Weller, the one who cared for her more than anyone else.

“... What a horrible... what... this, ahh.”

Unable to withstand the strain of continuously worrying about these grave issues, Günter’s thought processes snapped. The now-supported truth hit very close to his emotions that bordered on becoming a personal grudge.

“I had thought that His Majesty was only opening his heart to Conrart and it turns out that there was this sort of circumstance surrounding them. I see, then that is to be expected. I can understand why His Majesty will only relax around him. Aha, so Lord Weller knew. He knew that His Majesty’s soul was originally Suzanna Julia’s when he took it to the other world... So that’s why...”

The editor slaps both of his hands a few times on the table in unison like a child.

“Awwwwwww! There’s-no-ending-to-the-story-however!

Did His Majesty’s soul end up being born safely? I want to know what happens so bad however~!”

“What.Are.You.Saying!? If he had not been born safely then he would not be in this castle

messing around with Wolfram and flirting with Conrart... I hate you... This is unforgiveable, Conrart..."

Before he knew it, Günter had paled with anger and jealousy as he sat across from him. Wanting to get back to business, Badwik forced his voice to be as calm as possible.

"Uh, um, the Suzanna Julia Your Excellency spoke of, is she perchance the woman hailed as one of The Great Demon Kingdom's Three Great Witches, Lady Suzanna Julia von Wincott? If so, not only businessmen like myself, but most everyone in the kingdom knew that Lady Suzanna Julia was engaged to the eldest son of the von Grantz family because of an article in The Great Demon Kingdom's daily report so... ah."

Before he could even mention Lord Weller's name, he was stopped by a glint in Günter's eye that would easily extinguish the life of even a dragon. Skillful backpedaling is one of the most important tricks to succeeding at life. The editor immediately rearranged his expression and waved his right hand around in front of his face. His cheeks twitch a little, but he somehow manages to hold his business smile in place.

"Unfortunately our company does not have a periodical division devoted to scandals so no matter how fascinating a love affair, we are not equipped to spread it to the public. So that means that the only thing I can do is to not tell our competitors about this. Ah, what exactly did I just hear? I suddenly developed amnesia however!"

"It is lucky that you are an intelligent person. Forget everything you have heard here this instant. If you ever reveal anything to anyone about this, I will find you no matter where you hide. Snow Günter will freeze you to death."

He's half frozen already.

"... In any case, since it's a novel marketed towards the ladies... the theme is too serious and I can't use it... It's probably best to simply use the sound parts of your diary! It's a little lacking in page count, but we'll just play it by ear and revise it as we go. We'll make it more, more of an amusing, bookish piece of literature to read."

"Write it like a book!?"

"Yes."

"... I have to?"

"Of course however."

"Me? Really?"

"Who else is going to write it? Your Excellency is already The Novelist, Lord Günter von Christ."

Defeated by the title of 'Novelist,' his mind slips away.

Novelist, novelist, novelist. Ah, what excuse do I-... no, how should I explain this to my family? Oh, will I not have to practice a stylish autograph? It might seem unnatural if I write in a strange cursive, but majestic and angular letters would be amateurish. No but if they lose interest in this proposal while I am practicing then that will be unbelievably embarrassing.

However, there was no need for these worries.

"But Your Excellency's name gives a formal and stuffy impression so if it's alright with you, would you mind thinking up an emotionally captivating pen name that would be a little more popular with women? Most importantly, if you publish this under your real name then everyone in the kingdom will know that you were involved however."

“Ah, is that so? A pen name befitting a novelist.”

He’s a bit crestfallen.

The editor keeps on speaking quickly and brings up something quite far off into the future.

“I might be getting ahead of myself however, but I think that writing a good title will boost the popularity. How about something that will draw the eye right to it and leave a good impression?”

“... Hm, even if you say that...”

“If you don’t have any good ideas then, yeah, how about something like ‘The Ultimate Relationship Between Master and Servant’? The hidden feelings of Your Excellency directed at His Majesty. ‘I want to confess, but-I-can’t-because-you-are-my-master-and-I-am-your-servant!’ ... Like that, right?”

He feels like he’s seen this before, but he can only silently nod his head in acquiescence at the ‘right?’ and accompanying look of doubt. Once the editor is on a roll, no one can stop him.

The negotiations went without a hitch and finally Günter’s two works, ‘A Dream Diary that Starts in Spring’ and ‘A Love Diary Composed in Summer’, received minor revisions and were set to be published simultaneously.

As someone without any particular experience in the literary field who was suddenly tasked with compiling a two-part series. Even if he was told to add to places or rewrite parts, there was no way that he would be able to proficiently do those things.

He whined at every opportunity saying ‘I can’t do it, I’m so useless’ and other complaints.

Badwik was once again fired up with his work and provided some private, sunny support from the blazing editor spirit residing in the depths of his heart. If it wasn’t for that, the publishing date would have been delayed for a while and the works would have become unknown masterpieces.

To make matters worse, the publishing company had a deadline.

“... This is impossible. I cannot write anymore.”

“It’s okay however! You can definitely write it however!”

“But even though this is my diary, it feels as if it is someone else’s story. It is not interesting at all and I cannot even bring the demon language properly into my mind anymore.”

“That’s-not-true-it-is-interesting-however! This is something everyone goes through.”

“But... no matter how I look at it, there is no way I will be able to make the deadline!”

Even when addressing this serious problem, Badwik clenched his tiny fist and reassuringly said ‘You *will* make the deadline!’ to encourage the other man into self inspiration.

At first glance, this was a baseless assertion, but he might have grown confident after working so many years in the business world.

There was no longer any way out for Günter and the only thing he could do was keep on working even if he lost his time to sleep.

* . * . * . *

“Well now, you’re all dressed up. Are you going out somewhere Gügügüntü-güüü?”

“Yo-Your Majesty! ... This, this is uh... I have a minor matter to take care of in town.”

“Oh really.” Yuuri smirked with an I-see-how-it-is look. It looks like he is imagining something

mischievous. “Is it a date?”

“A d-date!? Your Majesty, that is absurd! I would never think to date anyone besides Your Majesty!”

“This again? You don’t have to be so embarrassed. I am very open-minded about the love affairs of the elderly. Love is love no matter what age and the Hiroshima Carps are still carps. If you’re not going to meet a girl, then what’s up with that bright cape? It’s not like something you would normally wear. And what’s up with that feathered mask... wait, a mask?” (1)

Günter was clutching a brightly colored mask to his chest with his right hand. Thinking that it was something he shouldn’t interfere with, Yuuri hurriedly evades the subject.

“Huh, a masked date... That’s kind of ‘adult.’ Well anyway, the weather is nice so have fun today! Say hello to the lady for me!”

“Aahhh Your Majestyyyy! You are mistaken! That is not why I have this mask!”

Actually, he had a book signing at a large bookstore in town that day. Since he had published the books under an alias to hide his social position, he could not expose his face to the public. Even so, he wanted to know what the readers reactions were and if he was personally involved, then the profit from writing the book might go up. Therefore, it was a masked book signing. A beauty in an alluring mask would sign the books, just as advertised. It seemed fun, but he couldn’t just rely on skill.

Yes, last month the two-part work was selling enough to stay in the black. However, it was only average based upon the actual numbers. From now on, the honest activity of the writer himself would be important in increasing sales. In order to reduce the mountain of stock stored in the warehouse, the new author of diaries, Lord Günter von Christ (pen name: different), would fight until the end of time!

The loyal servant of the great Boy King

He hid his passionate feelings for his master in his heart

And wrote a diary of dazzling love and conflict

They were the wild delusions of a nobleman, tosa.

(1) The Hiroshima Carps are a baseball team for Central League (which Yuuri isn’t very fond of ^-^). They changed their name to The Hiroshima Toyo Carps in 1968 when they began to be sponsored by Mazda (then called The Toyo Kogyo Corporation). Baseball trivia! X.x